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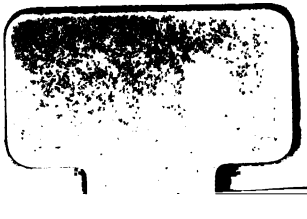

# CARSTONE RECTORY.

## A STORY.

BY

GEORGE GRAHAM.

"The world 's infectious; few bring back at eve,
Immaculate, the manners of the morn."—YOUNG.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# CARSTONE RECTORY.

## CHAPTER I.

"Men call you fair, and you do credit it,
For that yourself ye daily such do see,
But the true fair, that is the gentle wit,
And vertuous mind, is much more prais'd of me."

SPENSER.

"WELL, he certainly appears a very gentlemanly and well-informed man," observed Mrs George, in the tone we use when we are saying the best we can of a person to whom we have not taken any particular fancy.

Flora made no reply to this measured approval of her betrothed, but went on with her dinner in silence, with a flushed cheek and a hurried manner.

"What atrocious melted butter Mrs Manners makes. I really must leave off having fish as long as I am with her."

"This is very thin and bad," said Flora, in a subdued tone, feeling it necessary to make some remark.

"I met Sir Allan just at his own door, and he said he will be most happy to come this evening."

"Oh, indeed!"

"Yes: he really looked quite pleased. I wish I had paid him a little attention before, and Lady Crampton was gratified. She said she did so hope I would take him in hand, as she thought I could do more with men than anybody she knows, which was very kind of her to say."

"Very."

"When I know him a little better, I have

promised to make him leave off those rough-looking trousers, and to look in the glass when he puts on his neck-tie."

"That will be a great improvement."

"I have not heard of his paying the slightest attention to anybody, and he is decidedly the greatest catch in Bath."

"I suppose so."

"Not the least doubt of it. I thought Lady Crampton spoke rather pointedly to me to-day about his getting married. She said she hoped he would marry some decided beauty who would show off the old name and title at Court. I never met such a person as Lady Crampton for beauty. I am sure she thinks it can carry all the world before it."

"What a very sensible person she must be to think that," thought silly little Flora, roused at last from a reverie, in which the conviction was dawning upon her that she might have been both better and happier, when writing out clothing club tickets at Carstone for Henry,

than when listening in Bath to the flattering adulation of Mr Lepel.

What a vision rose up before her of a court dress, and diamonds, and feathers, followed by an uneasy sensation of jealousy (with which her plighted heart could surely, *surely* have nought to do) at the remembrance of those long conversations which were carried on in the dingy parlour down-stairs.

"It would be a very happy match for a girl," continued Mrs George, in her easy, chatty way, to which she had recourse when others were disinclined to talk, "for he is that easy, good-natured sort of a creature, who would let her have as much money as she wanted, while he would leave her at peace to act just as she thought proper."

"So that his wife might be as independent and as much admired as Lady Flower," said Flora.

"Exactly so, my dear; you are getting very quick at catching an idea (Flora felt much

pleased), only she would be richer, and more admired, and in a great deal better position than Lady Flower. And now, my love, you had better go and dress at once, for Mrs Cobbett is a quiet old body, and sure to be early."

Having dismissed Flora to her toilette, Mrs George gave a few finishing touches to the arrangement of her drawing-room, and then sat down to await the arrival of what she had truly called her experiment little party—for it was intended to test the capabilities of the establishment, before an entertainment upon a larger scale was attempted, which should include guests more formidable or more critical than those now selected. Mrs George (happy woman!) flattered herself that she never had been laughed at, and she was determined that she never would be; with her own eyes would she ascertain that articles in glass, china, &c., much vaunted by Mrs Manners, were neither broken nor altogether fabulous; and before her experienced observa-

tion should the postman prove that his assertion of having lived at an early period in his career as footman to the late fashionable Lady Dumbledore, did not give additional weight to the truth of our greatest poet's observation that

"Men were deceivers ever."

As had been before surmised, the first knock announced the arrival of Dr and Mrs Cobbett, who were spending a few days at the York House, on their way back to Oxford. Mrs George was anxious to show them every civility, as they had once entertained her for a whole week during the Oxford Commemoration, and she looked upon a second invitation as a thing not wholly improbable.

Dr Cobbett was a man of great learning, and scarcely any small talk; his lady was one of the most obedient and dutiful of wives. With her husband rested the responsibility of every action and of every opinion, and in consequence the current of her life, unbroken by

"cataracts or breaks," flowed on with an unruffled smoothness which ladies of more spirited and independent temperaments would have deemed impossible.

She did not talk much, and had never been known to enter upon any subject in her husband's presence until he had given the key note.

With such a couple Mrs George felt that the conversation must rest chiefly with herself; she therefore did her best, though without her usual success. She was of course not aware, though his wife was, that the doctor had not yet recovered his equanimity, which had been disturbed by the indignity of having been served with a bottle of port which tasted of the cork. The knowledge of this untoward fact must not, however, be supposed to have discomposed Mrs Cobbett enough to fill her with the unpleasant restlessness which harasses those who imagine that they ought to be able to prevent, or, at all events, to remedy every little mischance. No; on occasions like the present she would

wait for an improvement in the moral, with as much calmness and patience as she would for one in the natural atmosphere, never arrogating to herself the power of restoring a man's temper when he had lost it.

The advisability of wives adopting this plan as a general principle may be left an open question.

"I wish that stupid Eleanor Stuart would do as I told her, and come up early," thought Mrs George.

Eleanor was quietly reading by the lamp on her aunt's little table, supposing that, of course, the first knock had been Henry Mordaunt's, and resolved not to interfere with one moment of that influence which was now all important to Flora.

She could not guess that the restless Mrs George, who could not endure a stagnation of five minutes when she was entertainer, was looking for her with something of the eagerness with which a general might watch on

the field of battle for the appearance of an ally whom he cordially hates in a time of peace.

Flora entered, looking very pretty, and very carefully dressed, and that was all; she did not think it incumbent upon her to exert herself. With Mr Lepel and Sir Hugh Barton, and even with Mr Dillon, she had found it quite enough to look irresistible, and what could Dr Cobbett, with his old-fashioned trousers and ill-cut boots, expect more?

"Have you been adding, during your tour, to your *most valuable* collection of curiosities?" asked Mrs George, of her silent guest.

"Yes, indeed I have made a most important addition, the jaw-bone of a mammoth. I think the largest specimen that has ever come under my notice."

"How much I congratulate you; some people manage to get precious things in a way that is quite extraordinary."

"This was indeed a wonderful chance, but I think it would be selfish in me to keep any-

thing so valuable to myself. I have some thoughts of presenting it to the Ashmolean Museum."

"Mr Curtis."

"Mr Mordaunt."

And these gentlemen were announced by the postman in a manner so faultless, as to go far towards removing any lingering doubts of his veracity from the mind of the particular Mrs George.

The despairing hostess greeted these newcomers with the utmost cordiality. Mr Mordaunt so immediately sought the side of Flora, that she feared very little could be made of him, but she determined that Mr Curtis should be turned to the best account.

"When I have only one or two friends, I choose to be unfashionable enough to make them known to each other," said she, in what she considered a very taking manner, and having introduced Mr Curtis to Mrs Cobbett, she turned to her more formidable husband.

"My dear Dr Cobbett, this is Mr Curtis, a gentleman who has been quite looking forward to the pleasure of meeting you this evening, and who has really been teasing me out of my life to let him have your 'Geology of Mount Ararat,' before I had half done with it myself." Some authors are more open to the power of flattery than even a newly-come-out young lady. Dr Cobbett gave a bow as affable and as condescending as could well be expected from an Oxford Head of a House.

As for poor Mr Curtis, he had been so drilled by his wife into the necessity of adopting all sorts of polite sentiments (certainly not indigenous), and so subjected to after-fits of indignation or hysterics, if, when they had been imputed to him, he had said anything out of place, that he had begun to believe that there is something peculiar in the female mind which makes it liable to incomprehensible delusions; he therefore at once resigned himself to what had been asserted of him, and, taking

the chair next to Dr Cobbett, he at once entered into conversation with him, with, however, a fixed determination, as far as in him lay, to steer clear of geology. With all his care, he found, after a while, that they were approaching that awful topic, when, to his great relief, Miss Stuart was announced, and, appearing to have something particular to say to her, he contrived to quit his dangerous neighbourhood.

Up to this point it did not appear that the persons selected to meet together for this very friendly evening, had much promise of amalgamating well.

"I did not think she could have made so successful a *demi-toilette*," thought Mrs George, as she marked Eleanor's appearance. "With what ease and elegance she enters a room. I really might have made something of her, if she had not shown herself so *impracticable*. I wonder if Flora was right about her feelings for this wonderful Mr Mordaunt. I see nothing

in their meeting to show it. Flora is but a shallow little simpleton, and can't see far into anything."

A pity, good Mrs George, that she cannot see a little way into you, but this by the way.

"Thank you, Mr Curtis," said the smiling mistress of the tea-table. "Yes, that cup, be very particular, if you please, for Dr Cobbett takes pure green tea, without sugar or cream. Ah, ha! Doctor, I suppose it always will be so, the ladies spoil you,—here I am as bad as the rest, I have got your especial little tea-pot all to yourself."

"I am truly concerned that you should have taken so much trouble for me," said the doctor, graciously.

"Nonsense, you don't care a bit about it,—he is too much accustomed to having people take trouble for him. Is he not, *dear* Mrs Cobbett?"

Mrs Cobbett smiled, well pleased at this homage to her liege lord.

"I wonder where that naughty Sir Allan

Mountjoy is?" said Mrs George. "I told him to be early. Tiresome man, I am afraid he will walk in at half-past ten, expecting a rout, and that he won't find with me. You see, Mr Mordaunt, I am unfashionable enough to prefer little friendly gatherings, where sociable, sensible people can exchange their ideas, and perhaps improve each other,—and I am quite sure that there are some of my friends who are not sorry to find such a little oasis as this in the life of gaiety they lead, or they fancy themselves obliged to lead; but if I talk in this way you will accuse me of conceit, I fear."

"Of conceit!" replied Mr Mordaunt, drawing his chair nearer to her. "How could you think I could attribute such a feeling to an idea which does so much credit to your friends and to yourself? There are some whose circumstances draw them into much contact with the gay world, and yet they are not of it,—at least they do not become contaminated by a worldly spirit."

Flora turned her bracelet quite round her arm, and then back again, and felt uncomfortable; not because even she could see that Mrs George was playing the hypocrite with Henry Mordaunt, but because his answer might make her think him methodistical, an opinion which she felt would be annihilating.

Ah! silly Flora, when we really esteem or love, the opinions of others should no more affect our course than a contrary wind should prevent a vessel from still steering onward to its destined port.

"Sir Allan Mount*joy*," said the postman, with an *empressement* which showed a reminiscence of former greatness, and a degree of satisfaction in having again in his mouth a well-sounding title.

Eleanor, who was engaged in an interesting *tête-à-tête* with Dr Cobbett, perceived that the influence of Mrs Werter had already produced a degree of self-possession in Allan Mountjoy, and had given him a quietness of manner, which

bid fair in time to take from Mr Dillon's criticism its sharpest edge.

That great judge, against whose fiat there was, in the polite world of Bath, no appeal, had said that Sir Allan had two ways of coming into a room, which he adopted according to his different moods,—one was like a culprit appearing before a bench of magistrates,—and the other like a soldier entering a citadel through a breach.

This speech had been reported to Eleanor, and it had supplied all that was yet wanting in the courage which enabled her to give to her old friend the advice upon which he had promptly acted.

"Come here, you naughty man," said the smiling hostess, "and take the proper punishment of the late, cold Sally Lunn, and a very bad cup of tea." This was said with a view of putting her guest quite at his ease, but it had a contrary effect, which is more often the case than the dealers in *badinage* imagine.

"I really am exceedingly—" he stammered in some confusion.

"Oh, say nothing at all about it. I will save your conscience the burden of making any excuses, and you shall have a cup of tea a great, *great* deal better than you deserve. But first let me make you known to some very dear old friends of mine. Mrs Cobbett, Sir Allan Mountjoy,—Sir Allan Mountjoy, Dr —"

Before she had finished her sentence, however, the two gentlemen had shaken hands most cordially, Dr Cobbett having risen and advanced towards Sir Allan with a friendly readiness rarely seen in him.

"My dear sir, I am quite proud to meet you again, and to have the pleasure of knowing you by name. My dear, this is the gentleman who met me on the top of Silbury Hill, in that furious hail storm, and took off his own overcoat, and positively insisted upon my putting it on, and held his umbrella over my head when the wind was blowing hard—so hard

that it blew my hat off—and then he ran after it amongst those ruts filled with water at the bottom of the hill."

"I am sure, sir, we are greatly indebted to you," said the doctor's lady, quite bending forward from her stiff perpendicular. "My husband is so subject to rheumatism and ague, that but for you he would have been quite ill."

Allan bowed and felt much gratified, though he did not express what he really felt, that any little service of his own had been amply repaid by the doctor's intellectual companionship, when they had made themselves dry and comfortable, and had sat down to an impromptu dinner, by a cheerful fire in the village inn at Avebury.

"Quite a romance—quite an adventure!" exclaimed Mrs George. "Why, Sir Allan, I shall make you my hero. This is your near neighbour, Mr Mordaunt, but perhaps you know him already?"

"No, I have not yet that pleasure," said Mr Mordaunt, rising.

Eleanor observed that Allan gave him a look that was scarcely polite from its fixed and earnest attention—scanning him as we do a painting or a statue—in which we have been led to expect marks of rare genius or unusual finish. Allan Mountjoy was still a child of nature and of impulse—Mrs Werter's work was not yet complete.

A few words then passed between them, simple and kind on the part of Allan, and well-chosen and exactly suited to the occasion from Henry Mordaunt—who then resumed his seat by Flora. With less than his usual friendliness, Allan then shook hands with Eleanor. Why it should be so she could not divine.

"Now as you know my niece and Mr Curtis, we shall all be quite snug and comfortable," said Mrs George. "I am so charmed, Sir Allan, that you and Dr Cobbett met in that delightful manner."

"He is superior to what I expected," said Henry Mordaunt, *sotto voce*, to Flora.

"Oh, do you think so? He is very much laughed at in Bath."

"Laughed at! why?"

"Oh, because he is so odd in his manners, and all that."

"I see nothing to excite remark. Is it not the custom to think too much of outward things here in Bath?"

"I don't know, I am sure—I dare say it is."

"But what should you say from your own observation?"

"You are right no doubt—I am sure you must be," said Flora, fearing to get out of her depth with this formidable lover of hers.

How long had she felt him to be formidable? Was it before or since she had found it so very easy to get on with Mr Lepel?

"But you always call me right," said he, smiling indulgently. "Now I should be so glad sometimes to hear your own original opinions."

Flora looked up in his face and sweetly smiled—that sort of smile which is woman's

paper currency, not *always* answered by sterling gold.

And then she cast down her eyes and looked so meek and so pretty, that the man must be unreasonable indeed who could ask her a second time for an original opinion.

After the spirits of her guests had been cheered by her excellent tea, Mrs George begged Eleanor to give them some music; so she sat down to the piano and played a succession of soothing Welsh airs, with variations. She was not inclined for singing. Dr Cobbett, who had spent his early youth in Wales, was quite delighted, and asked for a repetition of what recalled so many pleasant reminiscences. Eleanor readily obliged him, and Mrs George remarked with satisfaction that he bowed his head in a stately manner now and then, in time with the music, as if he really enjoyed it, and had not made his request through politeness.

"I hope, Mr Mordaunt, that you are fond of

music," said Mrs George, "for you will find that, excepting conversation, it is the only amusement that I can offer. Dances I don't give, and cards, for many reasons, I disapprove. Not but what," and she lowered her voice, "I might get up a quiet rubber for my old friend Dr Cobbett, but this evening he does not look to me as if he required it."

"There can be no better entertainment than conversation and music," replied Henry Mordaunt, more and more pleased with the sentiments of his Flora's aunt, and beginning to smile at himself because of sundry apprehensions which had tortured him at intervals in the North.

Allan Mountjoy stood with his arms folded at a little distance from the piano, while Eleanor was playing, intently listening to the music, and with eyes fixed more upon the performer than possibly might have been the case had he been aware how carefully his hostess was scanning him, though she appeared quite occupied with a little sensible talk with Henry Mordaunt.

One or two songs, sung rather nervously by Flora, followed, and then the conversation began to flow so easily and so well that Mrs George spoke no more of the piano.

"There, that is the girl for me," remarked Mr Curtis, confidentially to Mr Mordaunt, at the same time giving his head a little motion on one side in the direction of Eleanor.

Henry Mordaunt, raising his eyes to fix them upon her, had produced this expression of commendation.

Eleanor was listening, with a look of gentle deference, to some profound observations of Dr Cobbett's; such observations as it is a compliment for an intellectual man to address to a lady at all. When she replied, it was in few words, but such as showed a complete comprehension and appreciation of what he had been saying; then perceiving that the rest of the company had become too silent and attentive, she contrived, without abruptness, to change the subject for one of more general in-

terest. But whatever topic she introduced, and however modestly she discussed it, in that small circle she was evidently the centre of attraction; when she spoke she gained attention, and when she was silent, all seemed ready to bring their ideas to her, to meet the bright power of her listening eyes, or to win the apt answer of her musical voice.

"She is changed," thought Henry Mordaunt. "I can scarcely tell how, excepting perhaps that she has lost a something which she is far better without."

And he remembered the light satire and the sportive rebuke, so fearlessly given, which in other days might have checked his more earnest feelings, or wounded his self love.

Mr Curtis, you ought to leave engaged people to have their talk quietly to themselves, and to leave off that habit of yours of pointing out anybody you may happen to admire!

"Really I think Eleanor will marry some old Oxford man, and live in a College," re-

marked Flora, piqued at Henry, who had ceased speaking to her, and who was giving his attention to a brilliant discussion carried on amongst the little coterie near the sofa.

"And why, love, do you think so?"

"Don't you hear how she is talking about gray stones and old bones?"

"She is inducing Dr Cobbett to give us a great deal of most interesting information." Now what a speech this was, and how unlike one of the charming answers of Mr Lepel, who would have told her that one glance of her soft blue eyes was of more value than all the knowledge that had been gathered together since the days of William of Malmesbury, and who would have added something about Blues, which would have extinguished all fear of Eleanor being able in any way to rival her own powers of attraction.

So Flora pouted and looked mysteriously displeased, and yet denied that she was so,—and so succeeded in destroying all the interest

with which Henry Mordaunt was prepared to attend to Dr Cobbett's curious and erudite speculations about antemundane life and matter. Allan Mountjoy, who had been so silent, and appeared so completely out of his element in every place where Mrs George had yet seen him, now gave utterance sometimes to a profound thought, and sometimes to a penetrating and original idea, with a grasp of mind which took her completely by surprise.

The weaker and shallower elements of society produce mental nervousness; where knowledge encounters knowledge and intellect sharpens intellect, it does not exist.

Mrs George felt quite charmed at the success of her little party when she found that her guests just began to perceive the necessity of going when it was twelve o'clock.

When they did separate, it was with the utmost cordiality. Dr Cobbett appealed to his lady to persuade Miss Stuart to give them the pleasure of her company at the Grand Com-

memoration in the ensuing June, and he himself assured Sir Allan Mountjoy, with an air of stately friendliness, that from him he would take no denial. Sir Allan, in return, hoped for the gratification of receiving him at Mountjoy (the first invitation he had ventured to give), and of escorting him to see a curious cromlech in his neighbourhood.

Mr Curtis invited Dr and Mrs Cobbett to dine with him on the following day, inwardly trusting that their high standing in Oxford would justify such a step in the eyes of his wife.

"Altogether," as Mrs George observed to Flora, when they were retiring to rest, "nothing could have been better."

Flora said nothing, but she was not of the same opinion.

That evening which, with her devoted lover by her side, should to her have been bright as with the hues of our forfeited Eden, had not been enjoyed. Eleanor, whose claims she had

taught herself to despise, had played a part more pleasing and more prominent than her own.

While she, unsupported by her admirers, had talked just as she would have done had Henry come in to drink tea with her quietly at Carstone!

Why had not Sir Hugh Barton, and Mr Dillon and Mr Lepel, that delightful trio, been present, to show him the true value of the jewel he had been so greatly fortunate as to win, by letting him know in what estimation his lovely Flora was held by the most distinguished *beaux* in Bath!!

## CHAPTER II.

" 'T is but the breath of heaven—the blessed air,
And interchange of hearts unknown, unseen to share."—CAMPBELL.

" TO-MORROW, dearest, at half-past ten." These were the low, parting words breathed into the ear of Flora when the little party separated.

The morning rose—a soft, mild morning in very early spring; and, before the appointed hour, Henry Mordaunt hastened to Rivers Street, to lead his Flora forth, away from the town and its ungenial influence, to enjoy with

him the sweet aspect of nature, and, what is sweeter still, the interchange of the purest sentiments of the heart, offered and reciprocated in confidence and trust.

And they went away together, those two who had entered into a solemn compact thus side by side to pass through life's mysterious journey.

How pretty and attractive Flora appeared in her well-studied and fashionable attire, and how proudly Henry offered her his arm—appreciating, as men invariably do, the charm of personal improvement—blind, as men too often are, to the deterioration of the heart.

And she took his arm, with an attempt at the old sweet confiding smile, but his first sentiment was not returned. He did *not* appear to her improved. What was it, Flora? What change had passed over him who had been to you in your retirement what Ferdinand was to Miranda, so peerless that amongst all

creatures the world might show you hereafter he could not be surpassed?

His coat looked more suited for country wear than for Bath; it was rather too high in the collar behind, and altogether not worn with that indefinable easy elegance which distinguished all the coats of Mr Dillon.

That was all!

"Where shall we go, dearest? Take me to one of your favourite walks."

What a request for Flora, who had no favourite walks but Milsom Street, and the Park, and the Pump-Room!

"I don't know, I am sure—let me see; you choose, that will be best."

"But you must know the roads about here so much better than I do; I only remember Beechen Cliff."

"That is such a hill to climb, is it not?"

"Ah, I fear that remark tells a tale; you cannot then be so strong as you were, for at Carstone you were a capital walker."

"Oh yes, indeed, I am quite strong," said Flora, hastily, "shall we go on the Bathampton road? I have driven there with Lady Crampton, and it looked very pretty."

"As you like," he answered, and in his tone there was less of tenderness than before. What was there that had already damped the expected happiness of this sweet morning walk?

Ah, hearts that love, how very quick you are to see the shadow!

"What would Mr Lepel think," soliloquised Flora, "if he were to meet me arm-in-arm with a strange gentleman? He would think it was all true, when my aunt managed to turn it off so cleverly, for she said girls who were known to be engaged were sure to be slighted."

Flora might have cast aside the fear of meeting Mr Lepel, for at that time, clad in dressing-gown and slippers, he could scarcely have progressed beyond his first cup of coffee, pre-

paratory to killing the hours in some way until he could go forth to see and to be seen.

A silence had fallen upon the two, which might be accounted for by the noise in Argyle and Bridge Streets.

They entered through Laura Place into Pulteney Street, which, though the morning was fine, looked rather cold and gloomy; at least it did where Henry and Flora were walking, for though there was a sunny side, they had insensibly gone on in the shade.

"This street is very long," said Henry Mordaunt. "I wish we had chosen a quicker way of getting into the country; even when we get to the bottom, we have all Sydney Place to pass."

"Yes," returned Flora, "it is very long."

Another silence followed, and it lasted until, having turned to the left, they had passed Old Sydney Place, and began to ascend the hill. When they were on higher ground the air felt more fresh and invigorating, and the opening

view at every step improved; the canal below looked bright and silvery in the sunshine, quite as if it deserved some other name, as for a canal it is very picturesque indeed.

"I could not endure a town for any length of time," said Mordaunt, the first to break the silence, and he seemed to breathe more freely, because now they had got quite clear of the streets.

Now this was a somewhat independent sentiment for a lover, and expressed in a very matter-of-fact way. Mr Lepel had led Flora to believe that in her presence alone consisted the charm of a place, and that as she moved she carried it with her, as Her Majesty takes the Court; and one day, when praising Bath, he had quoted with much pathos—

"If woman can make the worst wilderness dear,
Think, think what a heaven she must make of Cashmere."

Now here was a man who found a street long, though she was by his side, and who

could not endure a town, though she was in it!

Poor Henry Mordaunt, his feelings just then were too deep for flattery, too strong to find expression in the flowery language of Moore.

He had wearied of the length of Pulteney Street, and longed for the calm, sweet freedom of some country scene, that there he might speak more candidly, even than he had written, of those home sorrows which had clouded his before uncheckered path, that he might find a precious solace in the entire sympathy of her he loved. In his present mood he peculiarly required the support of woman's strong devotion, as man always does when any trouble has touched him nearly, though, in his hours of ambition, of business, of study, or of pleasure, he may stand alone.

Enough had been said in his last letter to call for tender sympathy, for the anxious question, or the loving, watching silence, waiting for the word that might justify allusion to a

painful and delicate topic. Surely then by such a silence was the gentle and womanly Flora now showing her concern. He must relieve her at once, and tell her that, though he had suffered much, and been greatly disappointed in one in whose career he had once taken a justifiable pride, yet that things now wore a more hopeful aspect, he must speak fully to his Flora, for he was persuaded that woman's kind generous nature makes her suffer more keenly for another than for herself.

Simultaneously with these thoughts of her betrothed, an idea was rising in the mind of Flora, not acknowledged, not understood, but could it have been moulded to an exact shape, it would have expressed this: "How difficult it is to get on with him. I am afraid we shall find life together rather dull. How much easier it is to talk to the gentlemen I meet in Bath."

An "Errata" might be useful for what we think as well as for what we write. Had Flora

one, it should have contained *for* "to talk," *read* "to listen," for that was her part in the flow of small talk, flattery, and nonsense, with which she was now accustomed to be amused; and she found it no difficult task to furnish her own contingent when nothing was required of her beyond the approving smile or the counterfeited frown.

But, Flora, the very gayest cannot always flatter or talk nonsense; and the most entertaining will find a time when they need something better than a listener; and dark hours will come to all men when in anxiety, in uncertainty, or in gloom; like the parched glebe waiting for rain, they will thirst for "the word in season," knowing "how good it is."

"Flora, dearest," said Mordaunt,—and his tenderness of tone had returned, for the slight cloud had passed away,—"you are not looking quite as I could wish,—I have, I fear, saddened you, and made you anxious. You must feel less for me, or in future I shall give you but

half my confidence. Your half must be all that can cheer and gladden, mine, exclusively all that can depress."

And he looked down upon her with a loving, protecting smile, expecting the sort of answer that a man does expect when he makes such a speech.

And Flora (the little hypocrite) returned his look with one sad and sweetly anxious, for though she was wanting in all the subtle power of intellect which marks the character of the Jesuit, she had at times an instinctive simulation which even the astute brotherhood might not have despised. She was glad now to have so good a cause assigned for her preöccupation, and to have her want of interest mistaken for over anxiety was fortunate indeed.

Ah, those who love us can interpret for us, in a way that makes the unworthy rejoice, and the conscientious tremble!

Very gentle was Mordaunt's reply to the wistful expression of that fair young face, and

kind and consoling was the view of all that concerned him, which he carefully placed before her.

And she listened, leaning confidingly on his arm, and was "very much relieved" to hear that old Mrs Mordaunt was grieving less, and better in her health, and "so sorry" that Henry had had so much to harass him, and "oh, *so* glad" that Alfred Mordaunt was awakening to a sense of the trouble he had caused to his friends.

And Mordaunt was convinced, as no doubt many a man, on no better grounds, has been before him, that love more entire and sympathy more complete than that which blessed him now, could scarcely fall to mortal lot. Oh, vanity of vanities, is *all* vanity, even to the purest of feelings given to cheer us on the road of our often sorely-tried humanity—ay, even to that unless we choose aright, and heaven help us in the choosing, for we may be blind indeed!

On they walked, until they reached the

village of Bathampton, and there they stopped for a while, to look at its picturesque, ivy-mantled church; struck with its air of pleasant, calm repose, Mordaunt began to speak of his own favourite church at Steyne, and this subject naturally led to his parish, and to those high and sacred duties which were to occupy so large a share of their united attention in that happy future which was now promising so brightly for them both.

"Beloved," said he, ardently, "what a privilege it is for us that our lot is cast amidst scenes so entirely congenial; a country life, such as ours will be, with its pure and healthful pleasures, and its earnest, spirit-stirring duties, is what we both prefer to all others; shall we not be happy?"

"Oh, yes," replied Flora, "very happy indeed."

Then came a silence, on one side very full of feeling, and then, with a sigh as though he

were doing something which he felt to be unpleasant, Mordaunt, with a slow, reluctant movement, took out his watch.

"What!" exclaimed Flora, "are you thinking of that nasty old train?"

"I am," he answered, with a smile, and looking half provoked at himself, and yet much relieved, "and I see that I shall be too late for the one I ought to have taken. Well, I must go by the next, it will put me out a little, but it will not make any material difference."

"But it will to me," thought Flora, "for that box of flowers from Jolly's will be sure to have been sent and taken back again, for I know they won't wait; and after all my pains Miss Tryon Jones will have the first choice of the new wreaths for the theatre this evening, where everybody will be so looking at everybody, and he will be sure to walk on now, and I shall be so tired and so fagged that I shall not

come up to what Mr Lepel's cousin will expect to see, from all that he has heard about me."

"Now, my own Flora, may we not prolong our walk a little, for you see I have a reprieve?"

And Flora acquiesced, as she generally did when anything was proposed to her.

"I must take care," he added, as they proceeded on their way, "or you will make me forget more things than the train. This must not be; so, when you see me in danger of thinking of you too exclusively, you must lecture me and set me right."

Ah, where was the tender reverence gone with which a few short weeks ago Flora would have regarded the idea of setting him right upon any point?

"I have been thinking," he continued, "of the extreme beauty and delicacy with which Milton makes his Eve give full expression to the one absorbing feeling of her heart. I mean of course the lines beginning—

"'With thee conversing, I forget all time,
All seasons and their change, all please alike.'

I so wish I could remember what comes next, but I cannot; perhaps you can help me?"

"Let me see," said Flora; "dear me, how tiresome. No, I can't remember it just now." And she frowned, and considered, and looked very wise, but for all that the words would not come. And no marvel, for though memory is, perhaps, the most wonderful and incomprehensible of all the attributes of the human mind, its power has one limit—it cannot recall that which has never been known at all.

Still when Mordaunt suggested what might be the next line, she said she was almost sure that he was right, and when he changed his mind and thought it must be another, she, upon second thoughts, quite agreed with him; and when at last, after various efforts, he laughed, and decided that they must give it up, and look at the passage, she laughed too,

and was of the same opinion, and so that, for lovers, did very well indeed. Directed by an old man, who was breaking stones upon the road (for Flora had learnt nothing of the roads about Bath), they took another route for their return, and passing quite by the ivy-covered church, they walked back by the canal.

"When next I come," said Mordaunt, "you must show me old Widcombe church, about which I have heard so much. What charming walks we will take together, and it will not be so long as I feared before I shall see you again."

"When will it be?" murmured Flora, trying to look and to feel delighted.

"I hope that my business will be brought to an end quicker than I expected, and then, if you have not returned home, I can spend Easter week with you here."

"I don't know about returning home," said Flora, in a voice that conveyed rather the impression that she remained against her will.

"But you see, when I talk about it, my aunt thinks me *so* unkind, and I do n't like to seem ungrateful; and she says she is so lonely when left by herself."

"An amiable view, darling, for which I cannot blame you. Yes, we must consider her, as she is so kind to you; I felt quite grateful to her last night for the way in which she spoke of you."

"Then you think I had better stay a little longer?" asked Flora, doubtfully.

"Consult your own wishes as to that, until I return from the North," he replied; and then followed many earnest expressions of feeling, and many an entreaty that after that time there should be no more delay in gratifying his ardent wish of seeing her at Steyne Rectory, his own beloved bride. The spring air was soft and balmy, and lovely; against the clear blue sky looked the trees covered with their delicately-tinted blossoms; and the water, though it was but a canal, reflected the sun-

beams pleasantly in gentle dimples upon its rippling current; and as Henry Mordaunt talked softly and tenderly of Carstone and Steyne, and of the radiant sunset they had watched together in silent gladness at Widow Grey's, thoughts stole into Flora's heart, with which the Amateur Theatricals and the box of flowers from Jolly's, and Messrs Dillon, Barton, and Lepel, had nothing whatever to do.

## CHAPTER III.

" For ever running on enchanted ground,
Passes the day, deceitful, vain, and void."

THOMPSON.

HENRY MORDAUNT was gone. The prop which had supported the weak branch of uncertain principle was removed, and again it was bending earthward, lower and lower still.

Come with us, reader, and look with us, not with uncharitable eyes, but with a gaze of sad pity and of deep concern. Come with us to the Assembly Rooms, and behold that fair young creature, conspicuous even where most press on

to gain the foremost ranks. See her with a smile and a welcome for all admirers, intoxicated with the poisoned dose of flattery, full of self-sufficiency and of vanity, grasping the sceptre of her precarious dominion, as if it were her all upon this side the grave, and she had nought to seek beyond it, and regarding every chance of rivalship with alternate terror and triumph. We put triumph last because that now ever preponderates, for she is the reigning *belle* of this her first season, and, as with other autocrats when newly raised to power, rivals may create a passing alarm, but they are soon removed from her path.

Come with us again to the Pump-Room on a promenade day, and again observe that lovely girl pacing up and down continually, until your eye tires, even of the peach bloom of her complexion, and the soft blue of her eye, and the dainty little bonnet, and fashionable cloak, and coquettish muff, which she looks down upon to smooth and looks up from to smile ;

that smile which looks to you, quiet moralizer, always the same—though it cannot be, as it is made to suit equally that tall, dark, pale man on her right and that healthy-looking, fair-haired, short man on her left; who, if there be any faith in physiognomy, must in temperament be wholly unlike.

But what you are thinking, or any one else is thinking, she cares not, for in her dictionary criticism and envy are synonymous—and it would not hurt her the least bit (though you are fancying that it might) could she overhear every word said by the three ladies seated on your right, and the two on your left, and the four just behind you, though they are speaking words, true and false, which, said of yourself, would, you are sure, if you were that shrinking, sensitive thing, called woman, make you retire altogether from society, and find out some secluded spot where busy tongues could never name you more.

The concert is over, and the gay party move

on into the Park; and, spite of late hours and the great fatigues of dissipation, the young beauty will not tire or flag, for admiration and public success are stronger temporary tonics than anything that the Faculty can recommend, and by them she is supported; and while she can engross such company as that which now attends her, she is incapable of fatigue.

And this is Flora Lonsdale, the soft dove of peace to Henry Mordaunt's dreams, the flower discovered by him

"So lovely and so lone,"

in his secluded country path.

There are, perhaps, few sadder sights than that of a man *mistaken*, cherishing his jewel, which we know to be paste, fondly admiring his priceless painting, which we perceive to be a copy, and eagerly pressing on after his bright, verdant resting-place, with its refreshing shady trees and its sparkling fountain of

life-restoring water, when we have discovered it to be the mirage which he can never reach. Yet a man may continue to wear paste, and be quite as happy as though a diamond sparkled upon his finger, and he may always be proud in the belief that his second-rate copy is the work of a master spirit with a deathless name, and if one mirage passes away from him, he will presently be deceived by another.

Will it be so with Henry Mordaunt? We pity him who goes on day after day wasting his heart's best feeling on that which deserves it not. We pity him still more when his eyes are opened and he sees his error.

Some few weeks had gone by since Mordaunt and Flora had taken their walk together, that walk which to her had seemed as the awakening of a better self which had been too long slumbering, that walk which to him had lulled to sleep vague suspicions and half-formed doubts.

And now that better self was asleep again

faster and faster, in a deathlike sleep; and those suspicions and doubts were returning and waking up refusing to be longer lulled.

How often, when a visitation of illness is coming upon the body, we have sensations which we cannot define, uneasiness so inexplicable that it seems in vain to inquire into its cause. We are not ourselves, yet we cannot tell in what we are wanting. We seek no advice, because we cannot tell what ails us. We know that, were we to speak of what we feel, friends would smile and deem us fanciful, and doctors would be at fault to find a remedy for that which as yet is no disease. And yet a sickness, heavy and sore, is coming, and it comes, and though it brings languishing and pain, and by it we are perchance stricken nigh unto death, yet we are relieved; that which tries us has assumed a real and a definite shape, and we can meet it.

And thus it sometimes is with love or friendship. A change is coming, but its shades

are faint and fitful, and blaming our own distrust—at first we will not mark it. A want of reliance is felt at times where formerly all was trust, but we cannot find its cause; those we love are not as once they were, and yet the difference is so imperceptible and so gradual, that, were we to complain or to seek a remedy, our charges would be so trivial and so little substantiated, that we should at once be ranked amongst the suspicious and the jealous. And yet, for all that, falsehood is coming, and it comes, and though it may lacerate and deeply wound, yet are we less burdened by the tangible evil, with which we can boldly wrestle, than we had been with its tormenting, dim foreshadowing. A cloud had come between Henry Mordaunt and Flora, a something which could not be defined. Her letters, instead of gladdening him as at first, left sometimes a depression, and sometimes an uneasiness almost amounting to irritation, for which he could not account to himself; the old expressions were

used, and the old deference to his wishes and his opinions maintained, but the first seemed colder, though the words were the same, and the second, though carefully expressed, appeared to become tame and spiritless—besides, there was a monotony in this constant agreement, continuing, as it did, even when he playfully attempted to provoke a little opposition; trying in this way to find out whether she cared to sift his views enough to know whether in her heart she concurred with them. But the answer was ever the same—"He knew best—he *must* know best—in that matter she would be guided by him." And what an unreasonable man he must be, to be sure, who could wish to ring any change upon such a sweetly feminine chime as that!

## CHAPTER IV.

" Relenting fool, and shallow changing—woman!"
*King Richard III.*

SWEET spring flowers are blooming in the well-kept parterres at Carstone Rectory; and kitchen-garden and pleasure ground, in the highest state of cultivation, are full of hope and promise of the bright things and the good things which will follow each other in quick and rapid succession, to add to the pleasure and enjoyment of their appreciating master. One want only feels Mr Bromley, and that he intends after a while to supply, by inviting his favourite niece to come again,

and, as of old, to enter into his deeper, and to understand and respond to his genial and lighter moods. In Mrs Lonsdale he never, at any time, had found a companion, not even in those hours of unrestrained intercourse,

"When thought is speech, and speech is truth,"

when brothers and sisters in their first home are to each other what the varied duties and circumstances of life can rarely enable them to be at any future time. Now, less than ever did the frivolous-minded and uncongenial sister furnish that companionship which a man, however self-sufficing he may be, requires at his own hearth. Now that there was no Eleanor at hand to hear his opinions about the change in the ministry, or any other interesting public topic, or to entertain him by combating some maxim bearing too hardly upon poor human nature, that he had just adopted from some favourite writer, carrying the argument just far enough, and no further; and now that his most delicate touches of wit either fell to the

ground, or never fell from his lips at all,—there were times when, with several important *ifs*, Mr Bromley regretted that he had not married, as, though quite contented as he was, he might have been in a still more agreeable position, if he had met with a wife perfectly refined, and almost faultless, and if he had had children perfectly refined and almost faultless too; and if these imaginary beings could have enjoyed as many creature comforts in perpetuity as himself, without thereby diminishing his own individual store. Now that last *if* often settled the matter in a most satisfactory and unanswerable manner, and it is doing so now as he is sitting contemplating Mrs Lonsdale, who, with absorbed attention and a curious twist about her mouth, which betokens mingled pleasure and pain, is reading a long letter from Bath; sometimes she smiles at the triumphs of her daughter recorded by her own pen, and sometimes she sighs to think that the time is fast approaching when

those triumphs must end prematurely, in the fulfilment of her engagement to Henry Mordaunt. Ah, mother, mother, the triumphs of beauty, and youth, and fashion have other ways of ending, as many a blighted heart and early-faded form can testify!

Thus ran the letter which this poor, weak woman was so eagerly reading:

"My dear Mamma,

"You ask when I am coming back to Carstone, but you tell me not to be in a hurry if I am enjoying myself, and I am enjoying myself, oh, *so much*,—and my aunt says I must not leave her, and that it would be cruel and shameful of me to do so, just as she so much wants me, as the very gayest time will soon be here. I really *must* stay over Easter week, for we have engagements for *every day*,—two or three for most evenings; and what do you think? Lady Crampton actually changed the day for her party, because we were engaged when she

asked us. She said her rooms would look *nothing* without me, at least so Mr Lepel told me. At Mrs Hunter's I was engaged *every dance* before I entered the room, and my aunt made me laugh so much by saying that gentlemen swarm round me like wasps about a honey pot, and I am sure that is odd in a place like Bath, where they say men are so conceited, but I am sure they are not conceited with me.

"It is rather awkward that Henry thinks I never dance anything but quadrilles, and I never tell him what I do exactly, for I am sure it will be time enough to give up dancing when I *am* married; and if there is no harm in doing it, there is no harm in saying nothing about it, for, as you say, men are so exacting, that if you give up in one thing, you may give up in everything. He thinks I go only to quiet parties, and so they are, for people call them, very often, little parties when they invite you. Now I want to know what you think about the Fancy Ball? Lots of people are beg-

ging me to go, and I do so want to, for I enjoyed that private one—I mean the one given by Mrs Carpenter, in the Octagon-room—so much. Mr Dillon looked really quite cross when I said I thought I had better not go. I am thinking if Henry does not come till Easter Tuesday, he need not know anything about it, and yet I don't know,—I get so much talked about that I am afraid he must hear of it, but then it would not matter so much when it was all over, for then he could not stop me, and if he gets angry, why, he *must*. He cannot expect me to shut myself up before I am married, so young as I am. Do you know that Mr Lepel has found out that I am engaged? Poor fellow, my aunt said the news was almost too much for him. I don't know, on the whole, if he is not even more agreeable than Mr Dillon, for one does not feel afraid of him, and I so *hate* to feel afraid of a man, as I sometimes do of Henry. What do you think of Mr Lepel?—(very impertinent of him)—he will call Henry

the *extinguisher*,—for he says he will come down upon all my brightness and put it out, so that he can never see it again. I was so angry with him, and told him I would never speak to him again, but he called the next day and brought me such a love of a bouquet, which he had sent for all the way from Covent Garden, and so I was obliged to forgive him; and now he will go on calling Henry the extinguisher, and my aunt says I must not notice it, as it is a very pretty compliment to me, and quite poetical. I have nearly quarrelled with Eleanor, she will go on in such a foolish way, even warning me against all sorts of innocent things. My aunt says it is only spite and envy, and that she would only be *too* glad if she had herself as many dangers to fear as I have:

"Wednesday morning—I could not end my letter yesterday, as Sir Hugh Barton came and would take no refusal, but I *must* go to the Pump-Room. You know I had *such* a letter from Henry this morning; he found out—I am

used, and the old deference to his wishes and his opinions maintained, but the first seemed colder, though the words were the same, and the second, though carefully expressed, appeared to become tame and spiritless—besides, there was a monotony in this constant agreement, continuing, as it did, even when he playfully attempted to provoke a little opposition; trying in this way to find out whether she cared to sift his views enough to know whether in her heart she concurred with them. But the answer was ever the same—"He knew best—he *must* know best—in that matter she would be guided by him." And what an unreasonable man he must be, to be sure, who could wish to ring any change upon such a sweetly feminine chime as that!

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sure I do n't know how, for Eleanor, sly as she is, could *scarcely* have told him — that I was at Mrs Carpenter's ball at the rooms, in a fancy dress (which was by far the most becoming in the room), and he goes on at *such* a rate, and spins out *such* a yarn about it, one would think I had committed murder. I shan't answer him till to-morrow, and *perhaps* not then. I do n't think, mamma dear, that I *can* go on putting up with his dictating ways ; I, who (I do n't mind saying this to you, mamma, though I would not to anybody else) might make my own choice from all the best men in Bath,— and, as my aunt said, a woman *may* get married to a man who does not know her value, though everybody else does—which would be *very* unfortunate.

" And another thing, besides Henry's unkind letter, has put me out,—Eleanor is actually going to the Fancy Ball, when I can't be certain about going myself, but I must go now. How could I stay poking at home, and see her drive

away from the same door to enjoy herself, when I know that if I could but only go, there would not be a chance for another girl in the room? I say this, not from conceit, but because I know you would be pleased to hear it, and it is *true;* of course, as I said before, I should say it to no one but you. But I was forgetting about Eleanor,—only think! Lady Crampton is going to *chaperon* her, and I must tell you how all that came about. She never knew her till the other day, and then she was introduced to her by that stupid lout Sir Allan Mountjoy; and because *he* asked her, and begged her, Lady Crampton is going to take her to the Ball. How mean some people can be, to be sure, to worm themselves in where they are not wanted, and I am sure Lady Crampton thinks it a great bore,—and here is the particular Eleanor, who finds fault with me for every harmless little thing, going to a public ball, on a *gentleman's* invitation,—and Mrs Grant is as conceited about it as if she had had a fortune left her. I

really do n't think I can go down to see her between this and the Ball,— and she has actually made Eleanor a present of a white lace dress, which she can ill afford, and Eleanor ought not to take it from her. She had much better spend the money to get herself nourishing things, poor creature; for Janet says that no one can think what mean little dinners go into the parlour, and sometimes Mrs Manners is almost ashamed to cook them. One day, when Mrs Grant was in bed, Eleanor had a sausage for dinner,—not to eat with chicken or anything else, mind, but a sausage *all by itself*, and those are the people who spend money upon lace dresses! But of course they are doing their best to catch Sir Allan, and think in that way the money not thrown away. He is going into Parliament, but you must hear more about that than I do. Mr Dillon says he wonders what sort of a figure he will cut when he gets there,—and he made up a speech for him so funnily, and stood up just in

his nervous way; but the Marquis of Donegal (who, of course, must know all about it) told me that men are not *obliged* to speak in Parliament unless they wish it, and need only sit down with their arms folded, and their hats over their eyes, and so, if that is all, Sir Allan might do very well. He is gone away, and I am sure I am glad of it, as it makes one quite sick to hear Mrs Grant talk so much about him. I must write no more, only just to ask you not to forget the post-office order, for *if* I do go to the Ball, I shall want so many things, and I must have that beautiful set of flowers I saw at Germaine's, all to match, for the hair, and the front of the dress, and the skirt to wear with my white dress at Mrs Prior's. My aunt says she shall *never forgive me* if I do not show a spirit and show myself, and I am sure Henry ought to be *proud* of my being so much admired. If men are jealous, why do n't they look out for plain, ugly girls, with no style about them, and engage themselves to them?

With love to my uncle, and hoping you will send the order before the flowers are gone,

"Believe me, my dear mamma,

"Your affectionate child,

"Flora Lonsdale."

"P. S. The Marquis of Donegal says that I am so much like the picture of a great beauty he saw at Paris, that he hopes I shall be dressed in the style of Louis the something—I forget who,—but Mr Dillon has already chosen my dress, and it would never do to offend him."

And this is the letter over which a mother smiled with pride, when she should have trembled in humiliation and in fear.

And this, Henry Mordaunt, is the transcript, faithful and unreserved, of that sweet feminine mind of whose sensitive delicacy and shrinking modesty you have so often dreamed, when the toils of the day were over, and you have sat in your quiet study at Steyne! happy

if occupied, happier still when, in musing repose, you gave yourself time to think, inhaling the fragrance stealing upon your senses by degrees of the night-scented stock under your window, and deeming it a fit emblem of her whose gentle virtues will be to you but the sweeter as your evening of life draws on.

## CHAPTER V.

"For all his mind on honour fixed is,
To which he levels all his purposes."
*Mother Hubberd's Tale.*

Two very different men are seated in friendly conversation in Mr Bromley's snug study. They are so unlike, and they contrast so well, that they bid fair to become what one of them would term fast friends, and the other would look upon as eligible acquaintances, with no reason why they should not always continue so to be.

Mr Bromley has no objection to the name

of friendship, and no disbelief in the existence of that firm bond between man and his fellow, but he thinks it inconvenient to become too much attached to any one; he is ever ready to be kind and neighbourly and sociable, but he thinks that positive friendship exercises an insidious thraldom over the feelings and actions of which he does not approve; he prefers to be free and at ease.

Sir Allan Mountjoy, to an ardent philanthropy, which prosperity is day by day more developing in his character, unites a strong feeling of individual regard, ready to be given in all singleness of heart to those more intimate associates who may be worthy to receive it. His is an affectionate temperament, which the rough outer coating of manner is gradually leaving; and he is quick to feel a personal interest in those who come in contact with him, independently of conventional circumstances.

"You disapprove of my expression," said

the Rector of Carstone, with a slight smile, breaking a pause which had come in the midst of an animated discussion.

"At first I did, but I have been carrying your simile a little further in my own mind, and in one way I acknowledge that some men may be called tools; only when I had made use of them I would not throw them from me, but lay them carefully by, grateful for the service they had rendered, and prepared again to use and appreciate them."

"And this you feel you could not do with Messrs Snobbs and Shuffle, and therefore you are right not to employ them at all. They are undoubtedly clever men for electioneering purposes, and therefore Sir Thomas, with the best possible intentions, recommended them to you."

"I know it, and I am greatly obliged to Sir Thomas Headington, or to any one who takes an interest in my success; but no one surely would be so arbitrary as to be annoyed

at a man for not following advice which goes directly against his own judgment."

"I beg your pardon, the world contains many such; but you will be quite right, and also very fortunate, if you never permit any of them to interfere with your free will."

"Well then, my dear Mr Bromley, we have done with Messrs Snobbs and Shuffle; they shall never do any more business for me unless they reform."

"Which at their age is not probable," said Mr Bromley, placidly.

"I would rather lose twenty elections than have undue influences brought to bear in my cause upon inoffensive, ignorant people; I could scarcely sleep last night for thinking of what had been done; I suppose it must end in my quarrelling with Sir Thomas, and making these men my enemies for life, but if it must be it must."

And Sir Allan, in the vehemence of his feelings, began to pace up and down the study.

Mr Bromley contemplated him for a little while with a look of calm surprise, and then said:

"Nothing of the sort, my dear sir, if you meet the thing quietly; impetuosity and excitement may carry the day in romances, and make men and circumstances succumb before them, but in real life, depend upon it, there is nothing like self-possessed and tranquil tact, which prevents a man from getting himself into dilemmas, and helps him out of any into which either his friends or his enemies may happen to throw him."

"Thank you, you are right," and Sir Allan stopped his irritated pacing, and threw himself again into the chair he had before occupied. "You have checked me at the commencement of an unreasonable and unprofitable mood; calmness and tact are certainly part of a Christian man's duty, without which he cannot live peaceably with all men."

Mr Bromley, whose sage counsel and judi-

cious hints had of late been wasted "on the desert air," could not but smile benignly at this speedy effect of his words. "In this man," thought he, "lies the germ of a great character."

And then the two deliberated together very quietly and prudently, as to the best way of avoiding giving offence to Sir Thomas, and yet of throwing the chief management of the election into the hands of men whose mode of proceeding would suit Sir Allan's views more entirely than that of Messrs Snobbs and Shuffle; and Mr Bromley, though he gave his young friend the benefit of his best ideas, respected him all the more for being only swayed by those that carried with them his own convictions. He found that Sir Allan, on many points, required information, but on none did he show incapacity; a valuable hint had but to be given to be well considered, and a fact once learnt was learnt for ever. There are such men sometimes to be found, composed of na-

ture's strongest raw material, upon whom, at first, those who from infancy have been drilled in the most conventional modes of thinking and acting, are apt to look down with contempt, but from such, in original vigour, may spring forth the great and the good.

"I will not trespass longer upon your time," said Sir Allan, rising, after a conference of unusual length.

"You have not trespassed upon my time at all," returned the polite Rector of Carstone, who in this case really meant what he said, though at the same time it must be confessed that he would certainly have made use of the same expression to the greatest bore he knew.

"You will stay and lunch with us, Mrs Lonsdale will be charmed if you will."

"No, I am obliged to you, I never take lunch, it makes too much of a break in the day."

"So many men think; I am, however, myself an advocate for such a social break; too

much business and individual preöccupation is not desirable, as you will feel some day, when you are a married man."

"I never intend to marry," said Sir Allan, shortly.

"Then in six weeks I shall expect your cards."

"You won't get them," and a dark look came over his face instead of the smile, real or feigned, with which it is customary to receive jests of such a nature.

Those who had known Mr Bromley the longest could never have it in their power to record that he had ever carried a joke too far; of course, therefore, he said no more, but mentally exclaiming, "Poor fellow, jilted then, I suppose, though with his family and fortune one would never have expected it," he followed his guest politely into the hall, attracting his attention as he went to a very fine pair of antlers towering above the study door.

"What a lovely home is yours," said Sir

Allan, as the two gentlemen stood together on the steps waiting for the horse, which had been led to the end of the avenue, to be brought up.

"I rather think it is," returned Mr Bromley, pleased with the tone of enthusiasm in which the praise was given, and yet a little surprised, as he was not yet accustomed to his new friend's sudden changes of manner.

A moment ago, and he had only said "yes," very abstractedly, on being shown the very finest pair of antlers (Mr Bromley was sure) to be seen in the south of England, and now with a bright countenance and beaming eyes he was gazing upon the shrubbery and the hill beyond, above which rose the village spire, embosomed in trees, all very pretty to be sure, but nothing very striking after Mountjoy, with its sloping terraces of velvet turf and far-famed glorious woods.

"I know this scene so well,—I have seen a sketch of it."

"Ah, I suppose one of my niece, Miss

Stuart's; she is so fond of the place that she has taken as many pictures of it, I believe, as a mamma would have of her only spoiled child."

"Of course she loves it; it must suit her so much better than Bath."

"And why so? Young ladies generally are very fond of Bath."

"So they may be," returned Sir Allan, evading a direct answer, "and I make no doubt that it must be very advantageous to mix for a time in refined and fashionable society. People should do so in their youth, to be able to carry a certain sort of knowledge of the world into retirement with them, should they in after years prefer it; only, taking all this for granted, the true lover of nature must feel more at home in a place like this."

"You have been much in Bath lately, and intend, I believe, to go to the Fancy Ball?"

"I do; I intend to see a great deal of society, even of gaiety, for the next two or three years, on principle—though I see," he added with a

slight smile, "that you doubt the motive. But my horse is very impatient to be gone, which I never am when in your society." And he turned and gave such a friendly, manly grasp to Mr Bromley's hand, that that sceptical disciple of Rochefoucault felt his heart the warmer for it all the rest of the day. Sir Allan had just passed through the Rectory gate and returned the very deferential salute of the gardener, when in the lane which led to the high road he was hailed by the stentorian lungs of Mr Hollowdean of Hollowdean, who had just turned the corner in his shabby gig with its well-worn harness.

"Driving after you full pelt," exclaimed that representative of an ancient family, who always indulged the comfortable notion that his honourable descent atoned for any deficiency in equipage or peculiarity of language.

"Do you want me then, Mr Hollowdean?"

"Now that *is* a good one; should I have driven along at a rate that all Sir Thomas's

stud harnessed together could not have matched, if I did not want you?"

"Pardon me, that is true. For what have you been so good as to seek me?"

"For what?—why, to tell you,—but bless me, what am I thinking about?" and the good Squire shook his head sideways at his groom, in a way that expressed to the man himself, quite as clearly as to Sir Allan, that he was not to be admitted into their confidence.

"I tell you what," he continued, after biting the handle of his whip for a second or two, "will you jump up here with me, and we can talk as we drive into Brainbridge, and let Jem here ride your horse? Don't be afraid, I see he is none of the gentlest, but Jem can master anything with four legs under it."

Sir Allan's only reply was to dismount, resign his horse to Jem, and get into the vehicle of Mr Hollowdean.

"That's right; now we are snug, and tight, and comfortable. I only wanted to tell you, out

of Jem's hearing, that you will lose this election as sure as eggs is eggs, and nothing to thank for it but your own blessed fault."

"Really, Mr Hollowdean, if you had no other information to impart, you might have saved yourself the trouble of seeking me," returned Sir Allan, in his coldest and haughtiest manner.

"Now do n't get upon stilts, for they are apt to break down, and, besides, they ain't comfortable things at all to use when walking with a friend. I tell you what it is, Mountjoy, I am regularly put out, and as savage as I can live, for I had thoroughly set my heart on seeing a Mountjoy of Mountjoy member for Brainbridge; and now we shall be represented by a low, pitiful fellow of a clothier, with neither blood nor education, and a wife ten thousand times more vulgar than himself, and all this just because you won't say what everybody always says, and do what everybody always does, on such occasions."

"I thank you from my heart," returned Sir Allan, earnestly, "for having supported me in so warm and friendly a manner, and if I do succeed—of which I certainly do not despair—I shall feel that no small part of my success I shall owe to yourself. But in one thing understand me, I cannot be fettered in my own views, either out of the House or in it—I can pledge myself to nothing which I do not yet understand in all its bearings, or promise what I know at a glance it would be impossible for me to fulfil. If, just as I am, and taking me as I am, the people of Brainbridge will allow me, as their sincere friend, to represent them, I am ready. If otherwise, I consider no situation in life worth the sacrifice of one grain of self-respect."

"Well, well, Mountjoy, say no more, have your own way. Give Brack, the clothier, a better chance than he could have against any other man. Make it up if you can with Sir Thomas, who is more like an Irish pig than

any man I ever saw; stop the mouths of those roaring lions, Snobbs and Shuffle, and do all the rest of the work that is before you; and I wish you joy of all your bargains."

"I have some difficulties before me, certainly," replied Sir Allan, "but what thoroughly calls out a man's energies does him good."

"And I'll help you, Mountjoy," said Mr Hollowdean, vehemently; "I'll go on helping you, for you are one of the good old stock, and a gentleman to the backbone. I'll help you, though we shall be sure to fail; and if I had a wife, I should see vulgar Mrs Brack trying to patronize her at the County Ball."

And he grew quite red in the face with indignation at the idea; but Sir Allan, passing by this supposed insult to the imaginary Mrs Hollowdean, offered him his hand with sudden energy.

"I believe you to be a true friend and a true man. For life let us stand by each other."

"Well, so be it—though life may be a long spell, but there's no knowing." And having given the offered hand a very hearty shake, Mr Hollowdean touched up his horse with the whip, though he always maintained that he never required it, and drove on for the space of about a minute in silence. At the end of that period, a long one for him, he pushed his left elbow backwards in the direction of Carstone, and observed:

"A fine old fellow that."

"Yes, I esteem Mr Bromley more each time I see him. You cannot be half an hour in his company without going away improved."

"Oh, as to the improvement I don't know; I suppose that sort of thing is more catching with some than with others. A regular old fidget his sister is, enough to drive any man crazy; do you know her?"

"Yes, a little."

"And his two nieces?"

"I know one, and have met the other."

"Have you seen them both in Bath?"

"Yes, many times."

"And Miss Flora, I hear, is going on at a fine rate; so my friend Curtis tells me. I am not at all surprised, for I am a plain man, and, looking straight before me, I think I can see better than some of your star-gazers."

"I am sorry to find that Miss Lonsdale has been talked about," said Sir Allan, gravely. "She is young and beautiful, and in that last word is summed up a power of temptation which we men could never realize, think over it as we might."

"Well, now, if a woman's love was not stronger than her vanity, she might certainly 'go to Hong Kong for me!'" exclaimed the honest Squire of Hollowdean.

Allan Mountjoy made no reply, because he was of the same opinion, only he had thrown a veil of excuse over Flora,—partly because of that charity which was in his heart towards all,—and partly because a spirit power was hovering

over him, almost like the presence of one who, grieving for her, had vainly tried to save her.

"A regular flirt she is turning out, so I am told," continued the Squire. "Now after this, don't talk to me of your unsophisticated girls. Unsophistication indeed! why, 't is nothing but unseasoned wood, that cracks in your drawing-room like a pistol shot, or an unbroken colt in your shafts, that tries to go every way but the right one. Give me the woman who knows the way herself, or will follow my lead when I know better."

The necessity of attending to the turn-pike which guarded the entrance to Brainbridge, here interrupted Mr Hollowdean for a while, but as they were rattling into the town he resumed:

"Some say it's a pity Mordaunt is so much away in the North; well, perhaps it's coming home to him for having played a double game."

"A double game?" interrogated Allan

Mountjoy,—and he folded his arms, and stretched his legs forwards as far as the splash board would allow, as if any movement were a relief to the intense anxiety with which he waited the reply.

"Yes, a double game; for before Miss Flora appeared upon the scene, what does our insinuating young parson with all his goodness, so romantic in the eyes of the ladies, do, but pay his attentions, in public and in private, to Miss Stuart, taking her books to read, and drawings to copy, and plans for alm-houses and schools for her to give her opinion upon, asking her advice about everything, and listening to every word she said as a young Cardinal would listen to the Pope. Not exactly coming on himself, and yet keeping off any honest, straightforward man who did know his own mind. But bless my heart, Mountjoy, what are you about? If you had said half a word that you wanted to get out here, I'd have pulled Whisker up before— So, ho! steady there!"

"Excuse me," said Sir Allan, from the road, upon which, with a sudden spring, he had alighted, "this is the shortest cut to the office of Messrs Snobbs and Shuffle,—I will go to them first, and join you in less than half an hour at the Green Dragon."

"Much he knows of Brainbridge if he thinks that the shortest cut to Snobbs and Shuffle's," muttered the Squire of Hollowdean to himself, and an uneasy look clouded his face, as Whisker pricked up his ears and trotted on very briskly to the well-known stables of the Green Dragon.

## CHAPTER VI.

"I learn'd the truth, and confirmations strong
Oblige me to believe it."—ELECTRA.

LARGE rain-drops were falling against the closed windows of a first-class railway carriage, and had been coursing one after another down the panes, until the prospect without had been completely obscured, and the occupants of the carriage had been thrown back upon such resources as might be found in themselves, or in any portions of the daily papers fortunately overlooked, in the eager

perusal of the most important news at the commencement of the journey.

One gentleman had one compartment all to himself, and from choice evidently, for before the train had emerged from the Paddington Station, he had closed the division door of the carriage which had been left half open, with an appearance of unsociability which had made the three men who occupied the other compartment smile significantly at each other. Once, when the train was moving on at its fullest speed, he had taken out a letter and read it with a look which betokened anything but satisfaction; he then replaced it in his pocket, and after a short interval pulled it out again, and re-perused it with an expression which would have plainly shown to any one who had watched him that the missive, whatever might be its contents, did not improve upon acquaintance. Now and then, when the sound of any light jest or merry laugh reached him, from those with whom he had cut off all communi-

cation, he would knit his brows and seize the *Times*, and attempt to read, but the paper would soon be thrown aside, for there are states of mind when a man, ill at ease about his own concerns, refuses to be interested in the most brilliant leading article, speaking powerfully of that which is of vital importance to a whole people; and there are phases of feeling when, at war with himself, or with those he loves, he turns away even from the prominent type which announces news from a nation's seat of war.

Swindon had been some time passed, and now the day, drawing towards evening, with its mist, and wet, and premature darkness, had more the appearance of November than of smiling, fitful, hope-bringing spring. The dim, flickering light of the lamp scarcely sufficed for any but a very determined reader, and such was certainly not the fair-haired, effeminate-looking young man who sat in the most comfortable place next the window, and

with his back to the engine. With a prolonged yawn he threw down *Punch*, declaring that there was nothing in it, though that same nothing had been occupying him for the last half hour; and further observing that he thought they had all been silent quite long enough, he prepared the way for conversation by beginning to talk very volubly himself.

For a while the topics dilated upon were of a nature that could not possibly interest a listener unacquainted with those who were speaking; each seemed very much occupied with his own personal matters; each seemed the hero of his own anecdote, and to have been the successful opponent of every one who had been so presuming as to measure his own wits with his.

All this was puerile and stupid in the extreme to the unsociable traveller, who, in a mood to be pleased with nothing, was certainly not inclined to be indulgent to the little egotisms and bravados which at another time might have been easily excused; he was glad

when the train went faster and faster, and on at its fullest speed, for they were a little behind time, for then, when the noise was greater, and the carriages shook and quivered with the motion, less could be heard, and he could think his own troubled thoughts undisturbed by the light-headed nonsense which had been grating upon his ear.

But hush, hark!—a word,—a name has been uttered, and had he the power he would have commanded "silence!" as peremptorily as an usher in a court of law; and then, when he had been obeyed, he would have shrunk back from what was to follow, as a criminal shrinks from the verdict that is about to condemn him.

"Well, Fred, I see you have not given up Tennyson, and 'your heart being as a prophet to your heart,' and all that style of thing, and so you want to talk to this pretty little Flora as well as to look at her; but I assure you, my good fellow, and Barton here will say the same, you have had the best of the bargain already."

"You do n't seem to have thought so yourself," retorted the other, laughing, "for if report speaks truly, you are always talking to her. I was told the other day that the Lessee, or whatever you call him, of the Pump-Room means to bring you in a bill, at the end of the season, for the wear and tear of the floor produced by your incessantly pacing up and down the centre of it by Miss Lonsdale's side."

Here the speaker stopped, very much amused at his own jest, and the others joined in the laugh very heartily. The speed of the train was lessened, it went slower and then more slowly still; a small station was reached—a brief halting time—a break in the conversation, and then on again. Would that topic be resumed, utterly hateful, and yet thirstily waited for, as we do sometimes wait for the bitter draught of truth, abhorring it and yet stretching forth our eager hand to take it?

A little more laughter, a foolish jest or two,

and then what was to follow? Henry Mordaunt, *this* was to follow:—a discussion which you are by no means intended to hear, and not one word of which would knowingly have been uttered in your presence, and opinions are about to be expressed of one whom, for the present at least, you are bound to protect from the falling of the very shadow of evil. You know this by a kind of fearful instinct. You know that though little has been actually said, much more is likely to follow. You know too (for a nice sense of honour, though you may listen to it or not, has told you so) that of those times in life when we are called upon to close our own ears, or the mouths of others, this is one. You rise restlessly from your seat near the window; what are you about to do? Closer to the dividing door, as close as possible, moves Henry Mordaunt; right or wrong, he is bent upon hearing; he will hear, he must; the truth hidden from him, *finessed* from him till faith has seemed to him credulity,

and trust unmanly weakness, he has an opportunity of hearing, and have it he will, for it is more to him than life, though it may be bitterer than death.

In the darkness and the misty rain they continued their talk, those men of the world,—idle, frivolous, self-sufficient, but, for all that, on some points oracles, able to think more accurately and to speak more justly than the deep students of mankind and of books,—the men, lofty, refined, and contemplative, above the world they live in, and judging it by their own high standard. And to these men listened the sensitive Mordaunt, as they discussed the reigning *belle* of Bath, such a *belle* as they acknowledged had not been seen in the gay city for the last three years, they undertook to go no further back; they owned her beauty, that point was carried with no dissentient voice; they spoke of her many flirtations, of her credulity, of the flattery she would take wholesale, of the little trouble required in administering it to

her, of the popularity this gave her with many who had no ingenuity in refining compliments, and were too dull to catch and send back the shuttlecock of *repartie* from the witty or sprightly beauty.

"But for all you say," observed one, "I never knew Dillon constant to one star so long."

"Ah, it gives him new life, I suppose, to be obliged to exert himself a bit, and do the talking; other girls are always firing away to keep his attention. Perhaps, after all, he will marry a pretty, silly know-nothing, like Flora Lonsdale."

"Not he; granted, he may marry a pretty, silly know-nothing, but it must be an unsophisticated one too, brought up in the country, but not eager for the pleasures of a town; not heart and soul bent upon gaiety, as Flora Lonsdale is."

"Besides," chimed in a third voice, "Miss Lonsdale is engaged already, is she not? to a

mythical young clergyman in the country, who, if he be a reality, had better have been looking after her this winter, than after all the rest of his flock put together."

"He must be an odd sort of a fellow, if he be really extant; sometimes I think he is altogether made up by that cunning, worldly-wise woman, Mrs George Lonsdale, to throw a sort of romantic interest over her *protegée*. She regretted to me quite pathetically one day that poor young things are sometimes induced, before they know their own minds, to make compacts they may afterwards repent of, but which a conscientious sense of honour (I wonder what sort of a judge Mrs George is of that commodity?) makes them keep to their life's misery; quite touching, was it not? And this was said quite loud enough for Dillon to hear. Would Mrs George like that match and the *entrée* at Dunraven Castle, or would she not? ha, ha, ha, what a woman it is, but uncommonly agreeable nevertheless."

"How is Dillon to appear at the Fancy Ball?

"In his own proper person, and no other."

"He ought to go in character. He chose Miss Lonsdale's dress, I believe, and she is going as Euphrosyne."

"Going as Euphrosyne! why, she is not going at all. She assured me very solemnly that she did not think it right, and that a public fancy ball is a *very* different thing (you know how she looks when she lays those funny stresses on her words) from a private one, though there may be the same company in the same rooms."

"Think it right indeed! She is going, I tell you; bubbles are more substantial than her opinions. Besides, why should she not go? She will be the ornament of the Rooms. I told her so, and of course she believed me, and it was no case of perjury either. I told her also that none of us would go if she stayed at home; that of course was a fib, but she is very

obliging, she believed that too. Positively there is something taking about her. If Clericus turns out to be a Mrs Harris, and Dillon makes no more movement than a lazy trout at the bottom of a brook, I do n't know what I might not be tempted to do myself."

"*You*, you younger son without a profession. You might as well think of offering twopence half-penny for a basket of strawberries in Covent Garden market at the latter end of April."

"No, no; if she can't get Dillon,—and she won't get him, I would back anything upon that,—she will try Sir Allan Mountjoy, with his long pedigree and broad acres. I know the course she is running as well as if she gave me her confidence every day of her life."

"Well, I shall smile to myself when I see Euphrosyne glide into the ball-room, to strike her worshippers dumb with admiration."

"*You* won't be dumb; your incense of flat-

tery will be enough to suffocate any reasonable creature."

"But I have not a reasonable creature to deal with, so let me alone, I shall do very well."

"Ah me! where are you off to, when this bore of a season is over?"

"Up the Rhine or to Paris,—can't tell which."

Through the Box-Tunnel they went, with its damp, sepulchral air. Henry Mordaunt did not draw up the window to shut it out, he did not notice it, he could not feel it. A short stoppage, and then for those who cared to watch for them came the lights gleaming tier above tier from the hills round Bath.

"Ba—ath," the sound rang along the carriages. As the word was uttered Mordaunt could have cursed it in his heart. Ah, man, man, poor man, with the shivered trust and the desolate heart, it is not place nor circumstance, nor any outward thing, that we should de-

nounce did we thoroughly know and duly weigh that nature to which we give our love.

Will they never get out, will they never free his way of their presence, those men whose words and whose laughter sounded like the mocking of malicious fiends? They are gone, and he also quits the carriage and moves away slowly, with head bowed, and feeble gait, as one who dreads to meet the eye of acquaintance or friend, as a bankrupt walks, beggared and stunned.

## CHAPTER VII.

"Heavens! can you then thus waste, in shameful wise,
Your few important days of trial here?"
*Castle of Indolence.*

"CERTAINLY, as you say, my dear, that *is* a letter."

"So cross and unreasonable, and tyrannical and *masterly*," pouted Flora, "do n't you think so?"

"My dear, on some matters women must judge for themselves, and form their own conclusions."

And Mrs George drew a footstool a little nearer to her, admired her hand and her brilliant

sapphire ring, and then played with the cover of her handsome Church Service, which on Sundays she always placed upon the table close to her elbow, though she never opened it.

"But do n't you think his attacking me in that way is most unpardonable?"

"My love, a girl must decide for herself what she can and what she cannot pardon in a lover."

Flora tossed her head and glanced again at the letter. "He has a right, he says, to *demand* that I should give up this Ball—am I to put up with that?"

"Why, Flora, that is a question you really must answer for yourself. You may be able to put up with a vast deal more than some other girls would, than Eleanor Stuart for instance,—how can I tell?"

"But I won't put up with more than Eleanor,—why should I? when she has never had half nor quarter the attention that I have had. I *won't* be mastered. I won't be told to do

this and not to do that,—I won't be ordered about like a slave, and I *will* go to the Fancy Ball."

"You have a little spirit then, I see," and Mrs George smiled a quiet, peculiar smile, the meaning of which would have been at once interpreted by any one a little more sharp-sighted than Flora.

"Why did n't he come on and see me last night, when he was actually in Bath, and ask me and beg me to do what he wanted, instead of writing in this way from the nasty Railway Hotel?"

This way of speaking showed rather more of the relenting than Mrs George approved.

"And what if he had come, Flora, and spoken as he has written?

"I would not have stayed at home if he had commanded me, no, not if he had asked it upon his knees."

Overlooking the idea of so unusual a method of issuing a command, Mrs George re-

plied in that tone of hers which was annihilation to poor Flora whenever she made any attempt at opposition.

"Yes, you would; you would have burst into tears, and looked very dutiful and very contrite, and begged so pathetically to be forgiven that once, only that once, and then you would have called yourself unworthy of him over and over again, till he condescended to forgive and contradict you."

"How can you say such a thing? Ask him to forgive me indeed! It is I who have to forgive him, and I don't intend to do it in a hurry, that's more. Ask him to forgive me? What would Mr Lepel say to that indeed? Why, he said only yesterday that Mr Mordaunt was more to be envied than Prince Albert himself, and if I don't choose to believe him, still he thinks so all the same."

"Nonsense, Flora, you should not take in every word you hear," replied Mrs George, a little austerely, for she had that in common

with many of her sex, that she did not like the open expression of conceit in another.

Flora felt and looked rebuked, as she sat and twisted about uneasily that unfortunate letter of Henry Mordaunt's which had given rise to the present discussion. An unfortunate letter it certainly was, as you, dispassionate reader, would at once have pronounced it; such a letter as a man writes when he is irritated, passionate, hasty,—when he uses such expressions as woman's intuitive tact would have softened, or his own better judgment would have left out altogether,—a letter which has a tendency to provoke opposition where it asks for concession, and says many things in the wrong place, more than a man is aware of at the time, or perhaps all his life afterwards.

Still in the whole of it there was nothing that a loving heart, knowing that it had wounded and wronged, might not have forgiven. Was Flora's still a loving heart,—could it ever be so purged from the dross of worldly folly as to be one again?

"Sir Hugh Barton, Mr Dillon, Mr Lepel," and the three gentlemen entered Mrs George's drawing-room, which she had succeeded in making an agreeable lounge for a Sunday afternoon. She went once to the Octagon in the morning, and then she considered that she had done enough; the rest of the day was given to desultory talk with any acquaintance who might come to see her, and there were many ready to do so, and to as much of society as brought together without any decided appointment. At first this seemed strange to Flora—after the Sundays at Carstone, strictly but pleasantly observed; but very soon she fell easily into this habit, as she would into any other that she found popular with those about her.

"Well, Mr Lepel, I began to be almost afraid that we should not have you back in time for the Ball," was Mrs George's address, as she sweetly smiled upon that gentleman, just returned from Town, for she was as gracious to *beaux* on the eve of a ball as a

would-be member is to his hoped-for constituents before an election.

"Your words are high treason to my taste, dear Mrs Lonsdale."

And the gallant Mr Lepel bowed to her and smiled to Flora—who had hastily crumpled up Henry Mordaunt's hostile missive and deposited it in the pocket of her dress, as a thing quite out of place and uncongenial with the present company; she then smiled and looked the sweet and tranquil angel; and not at all the outward form of that which one minute before had contained inwardly petty wilfulness, weak obstinacy, and ungenerous anger.

"It will be such a ball," continued Mr Lepel, "as never has been before in Bath."

"Why?" asked Flora, with that innocent look of wonder, which was one of her attractive weapons—once natural but now assumed.

"Can Euphrosyne, youngest of the Graces, ask me why?"

"I am sure I don't know," and Flora blushed and looked conscious.

"The first dance is mine, remember," said Mr Dillon, in a low voice.

"Yes, oh, yes, I shan't forget."

"And the second and the third mine," said Mr Lepel.

"And the fourth mine," added Sir Hugh Barton.

"Dear, dear me, I promised somebody for the fourth—whoever *can* it be?"

"But the first galop, whenever it is, must be mine," said Mr Lepel. "Now really, Miss Lonsdale, in case of mistakes, do in pity produce that fairy little tablet of yours, and let us have it all put down."

Flora hesitated a little, though she was becoming very worldly — writing down her dancing engagements on a Sunday was for the present a step beyond her.

"My dear," said Mrs George, "perhaps it would be safer to do as Mr Lepel advises.

You are such a giddy little thing that you will be promising twenty men in the Octagon-room, and forgetting all about it."

"Monstrous!" exclaimed Sir Hugh. "If you break your word with me, Miss Lonsdale, it shall be a County Court affair, you may depend upon that,—ha, ha, ha! so out with that tablet, if you please."

"I don't know where to find it," said Flora, who did know perfectly well, but she liked to make little difficulties, and to prolong any discussion in which she was the object of interest.

"Then," said Sir Hugh, "lend us a sheet of note-paper, Mrs Lonsdale, and we will make a rough draft, to be copied by Miss Lonsdale's delicate fingers when the tablet is found. Thank you, that will do precisely. Let me see—

"Imprimis, the Hon. Frederick Dillon.

"Second, Mr James Florian Lepel.

"Third, Ditto.

"Fourth, some person unknown?"

"Is it, oh, is it?" whispered Mr Lepel to Flora, in his low insinuating voice, "is it the too happy—"

Flora looked down, and a deep colour, not the soft tint of gratified vanity, but the crimson flush of shame, overspread her countenance, and back upon all that remained to her of heart, returned a scene so different to that in which she was now engaged, when that person, unknown of Mr Lepel's thoughts, had stood by her side, lingering for a brief, bright time, in one fair Carstone meadow, where the scent of the clover came sweetly through the air, and over the hedge hung festoons of the wild dog-rose. Then his affection, not yet declared, had seemed a thing too precious and too good for her, which, if it came, she must make herself cleverer, wiser, better to deserve; and now she had in heart trampled upon, disowned, and wronged it, and put it aside from her present path of pleasure as if it were some

heavy liability, some burdensome debt, which must be met some day, but might be delayed. Ready enough are we to launch out in invectives against the unsteady purposes and capricious regard of others, but how often has the seed of our own unhappiness been sown by ourselves, when we have been wavering and unfaithful to the good within our reach, secretly, each man in the depth of his own heart.

Mr Lepel did not complete his sentence, he felt puzzled and taken aback, as he had never been before, by this ready recipient of even his refuse nonsense. Had Mrs George read aught beneath the deeply-dyed cheek and downcast eye of Flora, or was it mere accident, and the way she had of always saying something, agreeably and lightly, when the talk of others failed, that produced the few words that acted like a talisman upon the struggling better mood of her *protegée?*

" Mr Dillon, another young friend of mine, about whom you expressed some curiosity, will

appear at this Ball. I have persuaded her aunt to give the poor child a little change, and my friend, Lady Crampton, has kindly consented to *chaperon* her."

"What, Miss Stuart?" said Mr Lepel, "why not have taken her yourself, and the two cousins might have appeared as Minna and Brenda?"

Flora's attention was reäwakened, and she turned, full of interest and full of smiles, to listen to Sir Hugh's questions about the happy *beaux* who were to have the privilege of dancing with her at the Ball. With a most innocent and deprecating look, she promised Mr Dillon to rectify a stupid mistake into which she had fallen, and to convince some absent gentleman that he was not engaged to her for the second galop, and that his, Mr Dillon's, name should be put down for it, and thereby she put the same Mr Dillon into a very agreeable and softly dignified mood.

"Have you heard that Sir Allan Mountjoy

is in for Brainbridge?" suddenly asked Sir Hugh Barton, who began to weary of compliments and nonsense, and to wish to change the subject. Sir Hugh, though idle and fashionable in his habits now, was at heart a practical man; and why it was that he did not employ himself in a sensible, straightforward manner, was a constant puzzle to those who had known him in his earlier days.

"In for Brainbridge!" exclaimed Flora, "why, mamma told me that he had done something stupid, I don't know what, and that he would be sure not to come in."

"But in he is, nevertheless."

"Dear, dear, what a pity."

"A pity, Miss Lonsdale, why?"

"Because he is such a foolish one to be in Parliament."

"Ha, ha, ha! capital; but if all fools were excluded from Parliament, the benches would be rather empty, eh, Dillon?"

"I am not sure of that," replied Mr Dillon, rather dryly. "I think the House of Commons is a good average specimen of the talent and sense of the country, and its new member, Sir Allan Mountjoy, will be no disgrace to it; on the contrary, he is a man who will be heard of, and what is heard of him will be good."

"No doubt, no doubt, not the least doubt of it in the world," replied Sir Hugh, who had a habit of never contradicting the dictator Dillon. "Allan Mountjoy can come out when he likes. Do you remember that evening when some people were quizzing away about Miss Cathcart's going about to all the balls and all the parties, season after season, and yet never looking as if she really enjoyed herself,—how he suddenly spoke out in her defence, and said that he knew from good authority that Miss Cathcart went out so much simply to please her mother, who would be mortified and distressed by her remaining at home,—and on he went

with something very fine—what was it, Dillon? —my memory does n't go very far in the high-flown."

"He said," responded Mr Dillion, "that there may be as much of self-denial and of the spirit of the martyr shown in encountering a season of gaiety, as in watching in hospitals by the beds of the sick and the dying. Our greatest trials, he said, are in the heart, into which no human eye can penetrate. I repeat it, Mountjoy is a man of an uncommon stamp, and of a charitable soul. I shall, if he allows me, cultivate his friendship."

"Sir Allan is altogether admirable," said the smiling Mrs George. "How just are your sentiments, Mr Dillon; it quite does one good to hear you talk."

"Self-denial in a ball room, *you* cannot fancy that, Miss Lonsdale," murmured the soft-voiced Mr Lepel; "to you the self-denial must ever be to quit the scenes 'where you are fairest of the fair.'"

But Miss Lonsdale was discomposed, and would have pouted had she dared, for thus early in her career was she beginning to be what Joanna Baillie so truly calls "the very servant of her slaves." The spirited defence of Miss Cathcart made her uneasy, even though she despised a rival whose beauty she considered in the wane; and she did not like that grave speech of Mr Dillon's, so unlike him, and so dull; a sort of high treason to the style of talk suited to her charming presence. Poor Flora did not know—she has now made herself incapable of ever knowing—that the most eloquent of spoken flattery is not equal to the tribute man pays to woman, when before her he can freely give utterance to the best and purest, the deepest and gravest, sentiments of his soul! A little more desultory, killing-time talk,—a little more nonsense, which began, even to those who spoke it, to appear very great nonsense indeed,—and a great work had been achieved. Sunday afternoon had

been somehow frittered away; a part of that time, given to us truly to refresh, and really to recreate, when we may supply ourselves with angels' food,—a sufficient portion for the working days of our week, had passed into the eternity behind us. Ah, well for Flora if that one day of all others had been given to retirement and to thought; if in the silence of her own chamber, removed from the power of worldly influence, she had met her present position face to face, had allowed her anger, even her mortification, to have spoken to herself alone, and to have been answered before the tribunal of her own conscience.

## CHAPTER VIII.

"Allez, j' étais trop dupe, et je vais ne plus l'être,
Vous me faites un bien, me faisant vous connaître."
MOLIÈRE.

"YES, sir, they are at home, but they can't see anybody to-night."

"I must see Miss Lonsdale; have the goodness to show me up."

Mary opened wider the street door, and allowed the speaker to enter; there was about him a peremptory steadiness of purpose which commanded the respect of this despiser of the general run of fashionably-attired gentlemen

who came so often to pay what she considered their stupid, unmeaning calls; a man who really had something to say, and a necessity for saying it, was a positive refreshment and variety to the practical mind of Mary.

"Mr Mordaunt, sir?" she suggested when they had reached the figure of Silence, outside the drawing-room door.

"Yes," was the short reply, uttered so sternly that another step was gained in Mary's good-will. "Too good by half," she said to herself, "for the poor little-born simpleton as he is come to see, which I hope he will find out before long."

Henry Mordaunt entered the room so slowly, and apparently so calmly, that he was too well able to mark the effect produced by his appearance. A tremulous, nervous start, a quick contraction of the brow, and compression of the under lip, an alarmed expression of the eye,—are these the tokens with which we greet the sudden presence of those we love?

"Flora!"

With no other word the young man stopped short, and stood erect, with his eyes, in which there was a world of painful meaning, fixed upon the lovely, confused, and strangely-dressed figure before him. A cerulean robe of the lightest gossamer texture, studded with silver stars and short enough to display the fairy foot and ankle, shod with shining shoe and silver sandal, a tiara of brilliant silver stars, from which descended at the back of the head a starry veil forming a soft and hazy covering to the golden tresses which were suffered to flow freely over the shoulders and down to the waist, which was encircled by a glistening silver band; this was the attire of poor Mordaunt's sweet country flower, whose timid shrinking perfections he had in his day-dreams deemed it his blessed privilege with gentle, loving encouragement to draw forth to the light of a long day of happy and useful life!

"Flora!"

There was an anguish of feeling in that one word that would have gone direct to any true woman's heart, and melted it to compassion and contrition. If at such a time the bitterness of a man's soul finds an utterance, but no response, let him even in his dreary desolation adore in prostrate thankfulness the Providence which has preserved him from the lot of many an unhappy husband, dragging on his home existence, blighted when at the best, and oh, in his hours of careworn depression, so inwardly spirit-broken that he would shrink from any human eye that could detect how weak he is.

"Henry! how you startle me."

And Flora tried hard to smile, and extended her rounded arm and snowy hand from under her cloud of starry drapery.

"No, Flora, no; we must understand each other better, before your hand and mine can ever meet again."

And Mordaunt stood with his arms folded,

and regarded her as fixedly as ever, with an eye that now spoke contempt as well as anger.

"How foolish and stupid you are, to be sure," said Flora, pettishly. "I am sure I am not going to offer my hand to any man who won't take it—a pretty something, to be sure. I don't see why one should come to that. If people will quarrel about nothing at all, they must; I am sure I can't help it."

"Don't trifle," said Mordaunt, and he spoke so sternly that Flora was awed. She had ceased to love, but she had not ceased to fear him.

"I made you a request, a reasonable and right one, and I couched it in language as earnest as man could use, and I find you thus."

And he gave her a look from the starry tiara to the shining shoe; not at all akin to the adoring glances she expected on that night, to be crowned, as she believed, with more success than had ever yet greeted triumphant

beauty, even in the brilliant Assembly Rooms of Bath. Flora's fear changed into irritation; Aunt Lonsdale, and the lady's maid, and the dressmaker, had together exalted her into something more goddess than mortal, and here was the man who of all others was most bound to admire her, at all times and on all occasions, presuming to give her such a look as that! Why should she put up with him any longer?

"Mr Mordaunt," she retorted, with an indignant toss of her head, "if you don't choose to admire my dress, I shall have plenty to-night to look upon me with very different eyes."

"Thank Heaven, I am able to see you with my own."

"For shame, don't use such language as that."

"Fool," muttered Mordaunt from his very heart, but, fortunately for his character as a gentleman, under his breath. "Then I am to understand that against my express wishes,

and in spite of what is due to myself and you—"

"Understand anything you like, I am not going to be dictated to, and I *won't*."

"Flora!—this from you!"

"Yes, sir, this from me; and why not from *me* as well as from anybody else? I suppose I am not a worm, or a servant, or a slave."

Mordaunt was silent from pure astonishment. Few men are prepared for direct defiance, that last weapon, in such cases, of a vulgar, unfeeling spirit. Flora, supposing she had gained an advantage, pursued it.

"I did not expect you to be so selfish and unkind as to want to keep me from a little innocent enjoyment, when all the people worth knowing in Bath would be so disappointed and so offended at my being so rude as to stay at home; and how bad of you it is to come with that cross face now to try to spoil all the pleasure of the evening."

"I have once before warned you not to

trifle," returned Mordaunt, in a tone of suppressed passion.

"Trifle, indeed!" said Flora, half sobbing, "there is not a man in Bath who would dare to say such a thing to me."

"There is not a man in Bath, or in the whole world, who would have a right to say it, unless your inexcusable folly had given it to him."

"Folly, indeed; I won't be talked to in that way. If you will be so disagreeable and cross to-night, you had better go away and come again when you are in a better humour."

"Miserable trifler—wedded to folly!"

"Don't call me such horrid names!"

"I will no longer waste words with you," returned Mordaunt, whose passion had now burst all restraint; "no man can reason with such a woman as you are, without lowering all dignity and self-respect. Go on in your career of mad, infatuated folly, and when the fools who now flatter have learnt to despise you,

remember one whom you have bitterly and desperately wronged; who would have stood by you in sickness and sorrow, in old age or poverty, had you, with all your failings, been but true to him. You will find the world's worship, could you command it, a poor exchange for one man's strong affection,—speak not, do not interrupt me, no words of yours can ever again restore you to the place you have held in my heart. With your miserable masquerading dress you have forgotten to put the mask upon your spirit, which has been my delusion, and would have been my ruin. Since I can no longer influence you, I obey you, and I go away, as you desire, but never to come again."

And Mordaunt turned and left the room, and who shall tell how it was with Flora when she was alone and free? There are some hearts which it is impossible to attempt to analyze or to understand.

* * * * *

"It is well, and there is no call for me to interfere," thought Mrs George Lonsdale, as from behind the folding doors, where she had cautiously placed herself, she heard the hasty retreating footsteps of Henry Mordaunt. Ah, false, cruel, and worldly friend, though now you have safely stood aloof, are you the less guilty of a share in the harsh and bitter cancelling of a bond once entered into with tenderness so deep and hope so buoyant? Have you forgotten those words of terrible import that once came down from Heaven, and rested upon earth to abide with man until time shall be no more—"Cursed is he that maketh the blind to go out of his way?"

Are there not the blind, the miserably blind in mind and judgment, who, guided by a strong and friendly hand, might still have groped their way in safety to the appointed goal, but who once turned aside, and falsely directed, have lost their way for ever?

## CHAPTER IX.

" Let Folly dress in green and red,
And gird her waist with flowing gold,
Knit blushing roses round her head;
Alas! the gaudy colours fade,
The garment waxes old,
Hartopp, mark the withering rose,
And the pale gold how dim it shows."

WATTS.

A LOOK of envy, obscuring and darkening for a moment the face of fresh, youthful, blooming beauty.

Flora, released from her opera cloak, and standing near the long mirror in the ladies' cloak-room, which reflected the bright image of her loveliness, and the shining sheen of her starry fancy dress, had her eye, and for the

time it was a troubled one, fixed upon Eleanor, who, with her gloves taken off, was gently stooping down to arrange what poor old Lady Crampton, who was in a mood of unusual fidgetiness, fancied to be something wrong in her attire. Eleanor's dress, which became her so well, was of white lace over white silk, looped up with delicate blush roses, elegantly made, and exactly suited to a full dress ball, but with nothing fancy about it; a wreath of blush roses adorned her glossy raven hair, and added to the slight tint of colour upon her delicate cheek. To the jealous eye of Flora (for she could feel jealous, even when soaring above all ordinary mortals as the *belle* of Bath) Eleanor had chosen the very dress of all others that should be worn that night, and she began quite to hate her own, though it may safely be predicted that the feeling will not outlive the first whisper of flattery that will greet her in the Octagon-room.

For the first time had Eleanor, her rival at

Carstone, met her on her own ground, and all worshipped as she believed herself to be, she could not endure the thought that even a few scattered ears should fall from the full sheaves of her own admiration, to be gleaned by her. How insatiable, how contemptible, and, alas! how truly pitiable is that dire disease of vanity! And how it is destroying more than the life blood, the very soul's light, of this fair young creature, considered more to be envied than an empress, by those two heavy, unattractive girls who are following their quiet-mannered, and not at all managing mamma, from the cloak-room, resigning themselves as best they can to the prospect of an evening of obscurity. They are the two Miss Maldens, whose names will duly appear in the Bath papers, and who will be supposed by their correspondents in the country to have enjoyed themselves excessively.

And could there be room, this night of all others, in the heart of Flora, for vanity or for

envy? Should not all passions, great or small, have given way before that deep funereal gloom of utter desolation which comes to the spirit in its loneliness, when the strongest bond on earth is broken, more sadly than by death? What, on that evening of excitement, was beneath the surface, who can tell?—only upon it appeared the same unceasing smile, a little more artificial, sometimes a little wan and absent, but still the same; the eye that met the admiring gaze as well accustomed to it, and the ear that lent its ever-ready attention to all flattery still. Perhaps a scene which to most under the circumstances would have been repugnant and unbearable, suited her the best; the unmeaning adulation of many might to her still the voice of wailing that must have been heard in solitude, over the loss of that which, once unworthily trifled with, would return no more.

"My dear, if you are ready, we may as well move on," said Mrs George, in a low tone to

Flora, for she did not wish by any delay to give Eleanor the advantage of the brilliant escort of *beaux* she knew to be waiting for them in the lobby.

"Oh, wait, Mrs Lonsdale, wait for us," exclaimed Lady Crampton, when she saw the imposing mass of violet velvet move on, followed by the sylph-like starry drapery.

Mrs George, with inward impatience, was compelled to submit; she did not like openly to disoblige her dear Lady Crampton, though she was beginning to cease to court her—as she perceived that she was growing every day more childish, and getting too weak and dependent herself to be of use in advancing others in the social scale.

"We are ready now," said Eleanor, when at length she had satisfied Lady Crampton that her rich point-lace was properly arranged, and that the clasp of the diamond necklace round her poor palsied neck was quite secure.

"Surely, my dear Miss Stuart," said Mrs

Lonsdale, in a supercilious, uncomfortable manner, "you do n't call yourself ready for a Bath ball-room, with your gloves not on? everything to the veriest trifle must be completely *comme il faut* before *my* party presents itself."

"My second glove is now on," returned Eleanor, quietly, for she had finished fastening it as Mrs George was speaking.

"But, my dear, excuse me, I really beg your pardon, but who did your hair? Look, Flora, does it not appear as if it were coming down on one side?—and it is a little rough, the short hairs are too much seen; dear me, what is to be done? I unfortunately have no comb, as I always make it a rule to be dressed perfectly at home."

"Here is one quite at your service," said a sweet, kind voice, and with a gentle, quiet smile Miss Cathcart, who was submitting with a sort of weary gratitude to her mother's over-careful reärrangement of her dress, handed to Eleanor a pretty little comb.

There was something in the manner in which Eleanor received this little attention which drew Miss Cathcart towards her, and she offered her services in adjusting the criticised hair, and they were accepted with Eleanor's best smile, and it was one which few could resist.

"Your hair is beautifully arranged," said Miss Cathcart in a low tone; "and what may seem to be coming down, is only your having had it dressed low, which to my eye is becoming and picturesque. The few short hairs I have quite smoothed, and now it is quite as it ought to be."

She said this in an earnest reässuring way, to prevent "the new girl," as some of her acquaintance had just termed Eleanor, from feeling at all damped before entering the ball-room. Miss Cathcart had trod the boards of the gay world for many a weary season, since the first when life had been to her all freshness and hope, and she understood too

well the effect of its petty spite and almost incredible littleness.

"Thank you very much," said Eleanor, sweetly, and the eyes of the two met with a look of kindness and trust.

"Now we really are ready, my dear Mrs Lonsdale," said Lady Crampton, and the four ladies passed through the green-baize door into the lobby.

"We thought, goddesses as you are, that you had flown away to Olympus," said Mr Lepel.

"We are ready to die with impatience," said Sir Hugh Barton.

"Good evening," said Mr Dillon.

Then three young men—strangers, who had come to Bath expressly for the Fancy Ball, and had been hovering hopefully near, were introduced, as my cousin Mr Barham Lepel, my friend Mr Sevenoaks, my valued acquaintance Mr Dort. The heart of Mrs George rejoiced within her; two attendant *beaux* to each

lady! what an appearance they would make pacing elegantly through the Octagon-room, and darkening the face of the earth to the envious eyes of poor dear Mrs Bagot—who ought to take her girls out by turns, but was in the habit of sitting with all four of them near the upper fire-place—watching the company come in.

Sir Allan Mountjoy, who had been standing apart, came up immediately, and gave one arm to support the tottering steps of Lady Crampton, while the other was offered to Eleanor.

"Two ladies to one gentleman!" exclaimed Mr Lepel, "such a monopoly was never attempted since—since—"

"Since the days of the Star Chamber," said Mr Barham Lepel, looking at Flora—and hoping from the happy chance of displaying a little historical knowledge to find favour in her eyes.

She smiled, and he felt appreciated and con-

tent. Seldom does triumph come to mortals without some alloy. The best, the most exclusive of the *beaux* of Mrs George Lonsdale's party, the ever-observed Mr Dillon, by some unfortunate chance, or still more unfortunate design, was walking on the other side of Eleanor, and devoting to her as much attention as he ever took the trouble to pay, and this order of things continued all across the Octagon-room, and in full view of Mrs Bagot.

Eleanor leaning on the arm of Sir Allan Mountjoy, with Mr Dillon claiming a share of her notice! a pang, sharp and quick, troubled the spirit of Flora, and spoiled all the soft speeches addressed to her on her right hand and on her left by the Messrs Lepel. What! one short hour scarce passed away, and Henry Mordaunt already beginning to be avenged!

"Miss Stuart," said Mr Dillon, as they approached the door of the great ball-room,

"it has just struck me that it would be a good idea to have a motto placed over that door, after the fashion of the Greek inscription over the Pump-Room. What say you to Byron's line:

"All regarding man as their prey?"

A smile of amusement bright and involuntary for a moment lighted up Eleanor's face, and then was suppressed.

"What say you to my notion?"

"Nothing."

"Why?"

"Because your observation was both too good and too bad to admit of reply."

"Upon my word, Miss Stuart."

"Will you dance the first with me?" said Sir Allan, nervously, and scarcely audibly.

"Yes, with pleasure."

And with a half bow, courteous and grave, Eleanor moved on from Mr Dillon with her partner, to find Lady Crampton a comfortable seat. And then Flora, yes Flora, in the glory of her

beauty and in her shining array as "the Morning Star," even when she believed that she had risen to her greatest height, came down low, very low, pitiably low indeed. She came down to court the man who should have courted her, or his notice would be worse than valueless. She had seen Mr Dillon lingering by Eleanor's side, and only separated from her by her own free will. This should not have been, this must not be again, and therefore upon him her whole artillery was employed, and that with a success which surprised Mrs George, who began to fancy that there might, after all, be more in her *protegée* than she had supposed. More of what, Mrs George?—alas, alas! how soon can the simplest, and those most ignorant in all that regards the higher aims of life, learn to handle the weapons of the world.

And Mr Dillon was flattered and won for the evening,—for it suited him very well, and upheld his character for fashion, to be able, without any exertion or obsequious attention,

to secure to himself the smiles of the *belle* of Bath upon an occasion so public, and when many were seeking what he without any trouble had simply to accept.

Ah, second Miss Malden, sitting there between your quiet mamma and your quiet elder sister, without a partner for this dance, or a chance of one for the next,—you who had too much dignity to turn aside just now and seek a recognition from the only man in the room with whom you are acquainted, how little do you know that you are upon a height of moral eminence immeasurably above that showy, smiling, lovely being who is devoting herself exclusively to one gentleman, while three others close at hand are vainly trying to devote themselves to her.

"Why do girls like that come to a ball at all?" inquired Flora, sweetly smiling upon her partner as they paced the room, after the dance was finished.

"Of whom are you speaking?" asked Mr

Dillon, carelessly, for he had ceased to prize, if he ever had prized, the words of this pretty creature, or to listen for them as men do when they expect something good or true, inspiriting, or pleasantly playful.

"Why, of those Miss Maldens, to be sure."

"Why should they not come?"

"Now, how naughty of you, when you know you are *so* clever, and can understand so well what everybody means."

This was a happy hit of Flora's; the same flattering opinion of his penetration had once been expressed in a different way, by a clever Oxford friend, at one time his most intimate associate, but they had now long been to each other "as parted streams," for the one had been living a life worthy of a man, and had exercised his talents to the full, while the Hon. Frederick Dillon has allowed his to run lamentably to seed.

Encouraged by the indulgent smile that now

played round the mouth of her formidable admirer, Flora went on.

"It must be very bad for quite young girls, like those, when they first come out, to be so *dreadfully* neglected, for they must have expected some kind of notice, and I quite pity them; but I don't feel for people like Miss Cathcart."

"And why is Miss Cathcart excluded from your pity?"

"Because it is quite time for her to give up thinking herself a beauty; she begins to look quite old and haggard."

"You think then," returned her companion with a sarcastic smile, the expression of which Flora was not clever enough to read, "that after a time beauties, like Bishops and Judges and old Admirals, should retire with a good grace, and leave the field open to their juniors."

"How clever, how *very* clever you are,"

exclaimed the admiring Flora; "now, is it true," she continued, with a pert, rallying smile (it is the end of the season, reader, and timid Flora Lonsdale has learnt to be pert), "that you once admired Miss Cathcart?"

Mr Dillon had a ready wit when he thought fit to speak, and a sarcastic chilling power when he chose to be silent. Now he seemed taken at a disadvantage, and neither of his weapons was ready to his hand.

"You don't mean to say it is true; but I suppose when you first knew her she looked different, not so dreadfully thin; and with a better complexion, I can fancy her looking well at one time."

"Why are you not always silent?" thought Mr Dillon, "why do you ever speak?"

But Flora continued to talk away, and to be as she considered every moment more irresistibly fascinating, and in her excitement,—for after the scene she had gone through before the Ball, she was—she must have been ex-

cited, she talked in a manner unusual to her; ignorant that she was thoughtlessly throwing aside the veil which had hitherto partially concealed unworthy sentiments and a weak, mean mind.

## CHAPTER X.

"Oh! can she bear so base a heart,
So lost to honour, lost to truth,
As from the fondest lover part,
The plighted husband of her youth?
Alas! life's path may be unsmooth,
Her way may lie through rough distress;
Then, who her pangs and pains will soothe,
Her sorrows share and make them less?"

BURNS.

"ADDED to all your other cruelties, Miss Lonsdale, I have yet to accuse you of one more." These words were breathed in the soft whispering tones of Mr Lepel, as he supplied the young beauty's plate with lobster salad.

"And pray what is that?"

"You have made me lose a bet—I betted that I knew your character, and that you would appear as Euphrosyne, and, behold, you dawn upon us as the 'Morning Star.'"

"What fun I had on Sunday—seeing how you were taken in; I dared not look up at Mr Dillon for fear he would laugh."

"Shame! shame! but ah, who can long be angry with you? And who can marvel, that one who could at will assume any of the varied shapes of beauty should change her mind as to the one in which she would think fit to dazzle the world?"

"Mr Dillon thought, after all, that the Morning Star would suit me best, as he said I had only just risen upon Bath."

"Where I trust you will never set," murmured Mr Lepel. "But still I am in a sad predicament about this bet; Barton will be crowing over me for the next week, and telling the story everywhere."

Flora looked quite flushed and triumphant

at the idea of being talked about in that region which was Mr Lepel's "everywhere."

"What is the matter? I fear you find the supper-room too hot and crowded," said Sir Allan to Eleanor, seeing that she became suddenly inattentive to what he was saying, and that the expression of her countenance changed from lively animation to a sad seriousness.

Eleanor raised her deep, dark eyes to his, earnestly, for one moment. How well he was beginning to understand their language; he felt now what she was feeling, he knew what painful chord was vibrating in her sensitive, womanly spirit, at hearing her cousin boldly told that she had been the subject of a bet, and in seeing her receive with satisfaction the assertion that she would be the theme of general talk.

"Upon that matter you have given yourself trouble enough," said Allan Mountjoy, decidedly; "I think, for your own sake, you must now let things take their course." Eleanor was startled at his so completely understand-

ing her, even though she had expected that he would.

"You read too quickly," she said, in a low, sad tone, "but it is a painful subject; I have been wrong ever to have discussed it with you; let us speak of it no more."

"But I intend to speak of it, until I have convinced you," said he, almost angrily, "you are wrong in trying to go beyond a certain limit, and in so doing you will only vex and disturb yourself without producing any good; when we have expostulated, and entreated to the utmost of our power, and have failed to deliver our brother, yet we have earned this for ourselves, that we may rest in peace, without stooping down under the burden of a responsibility never intended for us. We cannot change another's nature; to attempt it is a presumption, the effect of which will return upon ourselves, and be a thorn in our own flesh continually. We cannot be to any as a second Providence; to try it is an arrogance

which might make an angel fall. Believe me, even in striving to do good we should be very humble, knowing how finite and frail we are."

"Allan, how severe you are; I needed your sympathy just now, not your rebuke. Let us return to Lady Crampton; I am rather uneasy about her, she does not look quite equal to such a scene as this."

He obeyed her in silence, and conducted her across the room towards the comfortable seat which he had before secured for Lady Crampton; he did not speak, for that one word, "Allan," the familiar address of his boyhood of trial, had fallen upon his spirit like a spell, and a memory of the old kindnesses of the past came blended for the moment with a buoyant hope with which the future had all to do.

"Are you not fatigued?" said Eleanor, softly, to Lady Crampton. "We are quite ready to go, if you feel disposed."

"Go? no, indeed, my dear—you can't be tired yet; I promised the Marquis of Donegal

that I would stay over three of the dances after supper."

Eleanor began to think that she had been fanciful about her *chaperon's* appearance; that haggard, exhausted look might be habitual to her in scenes like this, when the midnight hour had passed, and when even youth and strength might begin to flag.

"I hope you did not misunderstand me just now," said Sir Allan, who had continued standing by her; "you called me severe, but indeed I was only trying to fight for yourself against yourself."

"And why such doubtful championship?"

"Because you give way so often to an anxiety which hurts you, but does the object of it no good."

"But when may we venture to give up our efforts, or say to our own conscience that we have done enough?"

"When our influence has been shaken off, and our remonstrances defied, then, at least

for the present, we must desist, reserving ourselves indeed for any hope which the future may bring, but ceasing to vex and weary ourselves to no purpose. The first teachers of a better hope to a ruined world did not remain to be thwarted, grieved, and disheartened in the cities that would not hear them, but they shook the dust from their feet and passed on."

"I believe you are right. I have found your sentiments, when seeming most stern, to be most true. I will think over what you have said, in the full, clear daylight, but now, to-night, my spirit is saddened within me at what my own eyes have seen, and I grieve for her,—I must grieve,—I cannot help it,—I do not choose to try."

"Nay, I ask you not to check a feeling in which the angels must be joining, and, oh, Eleanor,—for I may call you Eleanor, for you called me Allan just now, as if we lived in the past again,—do not mistake me, I have honoured, nay I have venerated you for that very

anxiety which, only in its excess, I have ventured to condemn, and believe me—"

"Allan, I do think, after all, I could eat a bit of that lobster salad, if you will bring me some?" said Lady Crampton, dropping the opera glass, through which she had been intently observing Flora and the Messrs Lepel, both of whom were assiduously attending to her wants.

Sir Allan immediately walked off towards the supper table.

"Oh, here you are at last!" exclaimed Mr Curtis, coming up to Eleanor, and shaking her hand as warmly as if he had met a friend in the midst of a hostile garrison. "I am sick to death,—how are you? If ever there was a vanity fair in this world, this is one."

"I am sorry you have not been enjoying yourself," returned Eleanor absently, for her conversation with Allan Mountjoy had produced an abstraction which, in one gifted with her ready politeness, was unusual indeed.

"As to that, *I* have been enjoying myself well enough. I am thankful to say that I can be contented anywhere. But, you see," he added, lowering his voice, "it 's Mrs Curtis; she, poor thing, is put out, and she is as cross as—as—I really do n't like to say what."

"What has happened to disturb Mrs Curtis?" said Eleanor kindly, and rousing herself up to be interested, for she could imagine many things which might occur to annoy a person of Mrs Curtis's temperament, even in a scene which the Bath *Chronicle* will duly describe as one of fairy-like enchantment.

"Why, you see it 's Mrs George Lonsdale. I beg your pardon, I believe she is a sort of connexion of yours; but for all that I begin to think her no end of a humbug. She 's mighty fine with her promises. She is waiting the first opportunity to do this, and will never fail to do that, but I have never seen the time come when she has done anything at all, and I 'm not going to stand that sort of thing. She

told Mrs Curtis that of all things she must come to the Fancy Ball, and when I said that we are strangers here, comparatively speaking, and that one ought to know lots of people, to make a public ball agreeable, she told me that I really must not interfere with dear Mrs Curtis's enjoyment, and it would be a fine opportunity for her to introduce, I can't tell how many Lord Marquisses of Carrabas,—and my wife was so delighted, that she gave her the very ticket for the Classical Concert that I was just smoothing my hat round to bring over to you."

"I am very much obliged to you for the kind intention," said Eleanor, by way of saying something in the midst of poor Mr Curtis's *tirade*.

"Well, it's lucky that you can be obliged for nothing, for one can't get much more in this mighty fine Bath of yours. Well, you interrupted me,—where was I? Oh, I was going to say that Mrs Curtis comes here, as you have seen, dressed in outlandish fashion, which I

do n't at all approve, as a Turkish Lady; and what does Mrs George do? For a long time she does n't see her at all, and then she shakes hands in the most humbugging manner possible, and passes on, and never comes up to speak to her again,—and when she has happened to be near us, her eyes have looked like the glass beads stuck in a doll's face that can't see at all."

"How sad," thought Eleanor, with genuine pity, "that this honest, straightforward country gentleman should ever have suffered himself to be brought into contact with annoyances so despicable."

"A man of your worth, Mr Curtis," said she gently, "has a right to stand on his own ground, without depending upon any other person. Do not be vexed at finding worldly manners in the worldly, but continue, as you began, to form friendships with those who, like yourself, are genuine and true."

Mr Curtis was suddenly more soothed than

he had thought he could have been; he had expected the sort of surface-comfort that people often give to a mortified spirit,—to have been assured that Mrs George could not have seen Mrs Curtis, that she would be sure, at the end of the evening, to make up for her negligence at the beginning, or, in another strain, to hear her abused as capriciously treating her other friends in the same unworthy manner. No! Mr Curtis was a sensible man, he felt at once that Eleanor had gone to the root of the evil, and he resolved, let Mrs Curtis be smoothed over as she would, that the worldly woman should annoy him no more.

"Mr Curtis, how do you do?" said Sir Allan Mountjoy, cordially, as he returned to report to Lady Crampton, with much regret, that his mission had been fruitless, as the lobster salad had all disappeared.

Mr Curtis returned his greeting warmly. So congenial did he feel it, to meet with two such sterling spirits as Eleanor and Allan

Mountjoy, just after he had been giving way to his first, and we will venture to say his last, misanthropic view of the vanities of the world.

Meanwhile the spirits of Flora rose higher and higher in the atmosphere of that surface-homage so readily offered to her, as she stood at the supper table, indulging in little caprices, and giving as much trouble as she could possibly contrive to do. With so many slaves, who would not be a little arbitrary?—and Flora felt a sort of restless avidity in claiming the services of the obsequious *beaux* around her,—for, conceal it from herself as she might, there was a void in her heart, which exaggerated flattery and lip-deep devotion could never fill. The cup, which had contained the precious waters of life's best draught, had been cracked, and where that has oozed away, will follow all that the world can pour in, though for a moment it may appear to replenish the vessel even to its brim.

With an air of pity, that deepened, even to

sadness, Allan Mountjoy lingered, in spite of himself, close to the group of which the laughing *belle* formed the most conspicuous figure. Allan had not yet cured himself of falling into fits of reflection at the wrong time, and so for the moment the extreme desire of poor Mrs Curtis to be supplied by him with the smallest conceivable portion of tipsy cake had been forgotten.

"Dear, what useless creatures you are!" exclaimed Flora, "what are you about? where are your eyes? do you not see that I have dropped my jelly spoon?"

"Where are our eyes indeed?" murmured the oily-tongued Lepel. "Where should they be, where can they be, but so entranced by your countenance, that they cannot sink to the floor unless in your service, and at your express command?"

"Then I do *command*, pick up my spoon!"

"Senseless spoon, to glide from such a hand nothing but inanimate matter could have left

you, until you yourself had thrown it aside," said Mr Bernard Lepel, stooping down and seeking the missing spoon, though not with much energy, for he had a secret fear of disarranging his very carefully-brushed hair.

"Unhappy spoon!" exclaimed his cousin. "Where are you gone? Ah, perhaps, dissolved by the fire of those bright eyes, it has flowed away in a stream of liquid silver, and our search will be in vain."

"Really, Mr Lepel," said Miss Tryon Jones, bluntly, "you do begin to out-Herod Herod. Here is the spoon you are making such a fuss about, and nothing has been dissolved but the jelly it contained, which I am afraid has not particularly improved poor Miss Pettigrew's dress."

"It is of no consequence at all," interposed Miss Pettigrew, with the most indifferent good-nature. "My dress is only an old thing, intended to exist through this evening."

Flora cast upon her a look of the most supreme contempt. Miss Pettigrew was her especial aversion, because none ever found it in their hearts to have an ill word to say of her; and because, with her plain face, insignificant figure, and dresses contrived for the occasion, she actually presumed to act, speak, and look as if in the scale of mortality she stood on an equality with the *belle* of Bath. Now here was arrogance—to confess that her dress was an old thing—when for that one evening, the most important of all in the whole course of the brilliant Bath season, enough money had been spent to make some husbands out of temper for a week, and many poor mothers self-denying for a month or two.

"If she did wear an old dress at this beautiful ball, she might have had the good taste not to say so," said Flora, looking round, and trying by a winning smile to bring Mr Dillon nearer to her side.

"I thought she showed very good taste," said that gentleman, dryly, without advancing a step.

"You naughty man, how *dare* you contradict me?" returned Flora, putting up her finger, in a playfully scolding, and, as she considered, irresistibly fascinating manner.

"She spoke what she did to spare your feelings, as you must of course be distressed by the jelly falling upon her dress. That to my mind was the perfection of good taste," said the imperturbable Mr Dillon, who spoke his mind when he chose, and then others had to receive it with the best grace they could. All that was spiteful and envious in poor Flora's heart sprang up at these words, and she could have cried for very vexation, but she did not cry of course, only she became still more excited, and talked faster and faster; encouraging to the full the foolish, unmeaning speeches of those around her.

"I say, Dillon," exclaimed Sir Hugh Barton,

in his loud voice, "Miss Lonsdale here will soon be too much for us; she has nearly killed us by her beauty, and now she is coming down upon us as a wit."

"Indeed!" said Mr Dillon, indifferently, as he helped himself to a glass of water, for he happened to be out of temper and very thirsty. Flora looked up and saw the cross expression of his face, and her spirits instantaneously rose; he was annoyed with her—yes, annoyed with her and jealous—nothing could be plainer than this solution, so agreeable to her insatiable vanity.

Ah, Flora, if you did but know how powerless you are to please or to harm this worn-out man of fashion, with the weary, unsatisfied soul!

"Yes," said Mr Lepel, in his softly modulated voice, never raised above a certain pitch in the presence of a lady, "Miss Lonsdale is indeed destined to overpower us; she says that Miss Cathcart looks like a muslin dress

washed out, ha, ha—(how gentle was that laugh) —very expressive, is it not? and so witty. I hope, Miss Lonsdale, you will never come down so upon me; I should sink through the floor, I am positive of that—washed out, capital! Just the idea, hair grown paler, eyes of a fainter blue, complexion going. Yes, washed out, ha—ha—ha."

Ah, Mr Lepel, you adroit and shameful flatterer; you perceive clearly enough that your present seeming idol is fast approaching that most lamentable phase in an admired woman's character, when the detraction of others is even more pungent to her wretched taste than her own dearly-loved praise. Smiling and blushing with conceited pleasure stood Flora, drawing on her glove in compliance with the earnest entreaty of an impatient partner; when a voice, indignant but steady, burst upon her ear. "Why should a lady, whose gentle, unpretending manners win for her even the respect of strangers, be made

the subject of such a comment? The elegance and high tone of feeling possessed by the lady under discussion will secure to her a life-long admiration; country pursuits and congenial scenes might restore the bloom of health, while the sweetness and refinement of expression already her own could never be given by any air that blows."

Having thus spoken, Allan Mountjoy walked quietly back to his party, followed by such a look of genuine admiration as had not been seen on the face of Mr Dillon since—who can say how long?—certainly not since the first of last November, when he returned from Baden-Baden, at the commencement of the season in Bath.

"Who on earth is that?" murmured Mr Barham Lepel to Flora; "is it Peter the Hermit, or John Knox, or any other dreadful being of that sort, with manners totally inadmissible in polite society?"

"It is Sir Allan Mountjoy," returned Flora, as she hastily took his arm and hurried from

the spot; "you have heard of him I dare say; he was brought up like a stable-boy, and used to clean knives and forks; his mother was some low person out of the village, never owned by the family. You see he has grown up as rough as a bear, and no wonder."

"Even a bear," returned Mr Barham, "would by instinct have spared beauty and sweetness like yours. Who but a savage would oppose with a great rough club the playful strokes of an innocent and engaging wit?"

"Yes, he is a savage, that is just it," and so saying, Flora, smarting under the remembrance of Mr Dillon's look, suffered her partner to bear her away the most admired and envied of the bright moving mass of waltzers that now filled the large ball-room.

## CHAPTER XI.

"Where now, ye lying vanities of life!
Ye ever-tempting, ever-cheating train!
Where are you now? and what is your amount?"
THOMSON.

THAT galop after supper, reserved by Flora for Mr Dillon, was going on, that galop, so full of brilliant excitement to some, who in it are finishing the last scene of what to them has seemed a splendid season,—that galop, looking to some aching hearts and weary eyeballs so wild and so mad. Feet bound along in quickest measure to strains of music more inspiriting than any that have yet been heard that night; weariness is denied by those who will spend

what remains of the day, drooping, spiritless, unstrung; the very musicians catch the infection of the moment, in their inspiring notes sounds no fatigue, and their voices shouting even above the loud tones of the air they play, produce an impression of elfish, unearthly gaiety.

Suddenly words are heard, agonized, yet distinct, amidst the clash of instruments, and their singing accompaniment, and the reverberating tread of hundreds of feet. "Air, room, make way."

And pressed against each other, hurrying to one side in a dense, suffocating mass, went the crowd of dancers, as if by one impulse obeying a command which thrilled through each one with a vague feeling of terror.

A free passage was gained, and ere it could be again filled up by the curiosity which immediately succeeds the first sensation of fear, Allan Mountjoy passed swiftly on towards the door, bearing in his powerful arms an object which would have been pitiable to behold at

any time, or in any place, and which, opposed to the present scene, was awful in the extreme. Yes, lying across his breast, with her head pillowed tenderly upon his shoulder, was the form of poor old Lady Crampton, rigid and motionless, the countenance livid and ghastly, struck by paralysis or death, who could tell which,—who of the many who started forward to gaze, and then fell back again appalled?

On went Allan Mountjoy, seeking aid from no one, followed closely by Eleanor, trembling and pale as death, but perfectly self-possessed, on through the Octagon-room filled with another set of dancers, dancing to a second band. A sudden shriek, another and another, and fair forms in dazzling dresses stopped short in the giddy whirl, and clung half fainting to their partners' arms. In the midst of life, of bounding, eager, reckless life, are we indeed in death,—ah, bear it far away, faster, faster still, that frightful thing, the aged, haggard woman, with that fearful expression which

none who so unexpectedly beheld it can ever forget, contrasted as it is with the rich ball dress, the priceless lace, the diamonds, and the *rouge*. Ay, bear her away to some still, calm chamber, where she should have waited in quietness and in hope for that which to her could not be long in coming. Smothered exclamations passed, whispered words of terror or of blame, yes, blame from very worldly lips, of one poor aged worldling, who had loved what they were loving now, so passionately from the dawn of her youth, until she had long passed mortality's allotted term of life.

Away from the Octagon-room, quick almost as thought, and Allan, still followed by Eleanor, had carried his sad burden into one of the quieter side rooms. Many whose humanity had conquered their alarm had followed him, and to them he appealed for the best medical aid that could be furnished on the moment. A quick and excited call for doctors was answered by the appearance of one in the

character of Othello, another as Paul Pry, a third gorgeously attired as Tippoo Saib. Though each of these might have been master of his profession, and thoroughly to be relied upon, Allan could not help turning from them with a sickening feeling, which, even in that fearful moment, he knew to be unjust, and he gave his confidence to a grave, earnest-looking man, dressed in the ordinary evening attire of a gentleman. A careful examination of the poor, senseless patient was made, during which this doctor appealed at times to the opinion of the three others, and then followed the brief words:

"She still breathes, it is just possible that she may survive. Take her home."

"You will not leave her at such a time to the care of servants? You will come with her, and aid me in doing all that can be done for her now?" said Allan Mountjoy to Eleanor, in a tone of most earnest entreaty.

"Certainly I will come;" and then, as Allan

raised the poor invalid in his arms to carry her immediately to the carriage, Eleanor looked round upon those present to see if she could find any one who would judiciously explain the sad reason of her absence to her aunt.

"You wish something done?" said Mr Dillon, promptly coming to her side; "say what."

"Thank you, thank you. May I then beg you to be so very kind as to go to my aunt, and tell her why I do not return? You will find her sitting up for me. Remember, if you please, that she is not well, and that she is easily frightened. How grateful I should be if you will take this trouble."

Mr Dillon only inclined his head, but Eleanor was perfectly satisfied. He offered her his arm, and they followed the quick movements of Allan Mountjoy. A cold air swept through the long passages, the raw, chilly air that precedes the dawn. Light footsteps came after them along the sanded floor, and kind hands gently placed an opera cloak round

Eleanor's shoulders, which were shivering from agitation and cold. She turned round hastily to thank the author of a kindness so thoughtful and so acceptable, when she encountered the sorrowful, pitying eyes of Miss Cathcart. With a sudden impulse she kissed the pale expressive face, so close to hers, which in that moment of alarm looked like the serene countenance of an angel. And from that time those two were friends for life.

"Thank you," said Mr Dillon, as Miss Cathcart, without lingering, turned from them and disappeared along the passage. A moment after, and in a gentle, almost reverential manner, Mr Dillon had handed Eleanor into the carriage, already occupied by Allan Mountjoy and his poor stricken relative.

## CHAPTER XII.

"Yet still it leaves a void behind,
And dulness stupifies the mind.
The season of enjoyment o'er,
The phantom then can please no more:
Brief is its time, it soon is past;
A vernal bloom not made to last."

DOCTOR SYNTAX.

"THANK you, Mary, that will do; leave the little saucepan there, I can keep the sago warm, and you had better go to bed. You know there is Mrs George Lonsdale's maid sitting up, and she can open the door. I am sure she has little enough to do in the day, and you require rest twice as much as she does."

"Thank you, ma'am, you are about right there."

"Stop a moment, Mary,—did you get admitted into the gallery? and what did you think of the fine dresses?"

Mrs Grant did not particularly enjoy the long silent hours of sitting up and waiting for Eleanor's return, though she had resolutely insisted upon doing it, and now she felt that a little news from Mary would be welcome to break the time a little. She had done very well for a while, first knitting away very fast, and indulging in a pleasant day-dream that now often occupied her thoughts, and then she had read till her eyes ached, and at that period the appearance of Mary was hailed as we do hail sometimes the coming of any human face, when our solitude, at first so much enjoyed, has lasted too long.

"Why, yes, ma'am," said Mary, "I did get into the gallery, as Lady Crampton's footman knew some of the doorkeepers, and a lot of

other servants got in too; we had a good look down into the tea-room, I think they calls it, for they seems there to have a room for a'most everything, and lor, ma'am, what Merry Andrews the people did look like!"

"Not all of them, Mary?"

"No, ma'am, thank goodness some of them was dressed like Christians."

"But I suppose the fancy dresses looked very handsome?"

"Not half so handsome, ma'am, to my thinking as I expected; I likes, after all, to see a gentleman dressed like a gentleman, and a lady dressed like a lady. If I was a lady I'd never demean myself by wearing short petticoats, and carrying a basket on my arm as if I had something to sell; let ladies be ladies (if they can), and market women be market women, say I."

"I think you are right; do just close that door, Mary, I feel a little twinge of the rheumatism in my left shoulder. I think there

never was such a place for draughts in the world as Bath. Thank you. Did you see Miss Flora?"

"Yes, ma'am, I saw Miss Flora," said Mary, dryly.

"Well, and how did she look?"

"I don't like anybody in an outlandish dress, and if I'd been Miss Flora I'd have put on black to-night, ay, and a widow's cap too, sooner than I'd have gone to that vanity fair of a place, all dressed up and spangly like a dancing girl at a fair."

"Put on black,—wear a widow's cap!" said the puzzled Mrs Grant.

"Yes, ma'am, or a fool's cap and bells,—either would have suited."

"Mary, Mary," interposed Mrs Grant, reprovingly.

"Well, ma'am, I always kept myself up as much as any woman, gentle or simple, though I say it myself; but if I'd a sent a man away as I knew loved me and no nonsense, as she

sent away Mr Mordaunt this very evening, aggravated and miserable, as goodness knows he'd a good right to be, I'd have put on mourning till he come back again sooner than I'd have gone to that jigetty place, smiling all round at half-a-dozen sim-sammering men at a time."

"Was Mr Mordaunt here to-night then?"

"Yes, he was, and —"

"Ret a tet, tet, tet, tet."

A very gentle knock it was that stopped what Mary intended further to communicate.

"I didn't hear the fly, Mary, did you? Why, she is earlier than I expected,—I hope she enjoyed herself. Run and let her in, quick, and take the umbrella, for it is such a wet night." Mary went to the street door and returned.

"Not Miss Stuart, but a gentleman, ma'am; sorry it is so late, he says, but he wants to see you for a few minutes."

"A gentleman! dear me, dear me, who is

it, Mary? Is it really a gentleman? What is his name?"

"One of them as is always up in the drawing-room," returned Mary, rather contemptuously. "There's his card."

And she produced that important passport, as though it were an article of very second-rate and trivial consequence.

"Mr Dillon! dear me, what can he be come about? Quick, quick, Mary, put that saucepan out of sight, and here take my dressing-gown away, and shut the bed-room door. There never was such a place as Bath, you can't be free from callers even in the middle of the night. Show him in, Mary, at once, and do n't keep a gentleman waiting out in that cold passage."

Mary, inwardly rebelling at the injustice of poor nervous Mrs Grant's last words, did show the gentleman in, with about as much deference as she would have bestowed upon an officer bringing a summons from the County Court.

With a most gentle courtesy of manner Mr Dillon entered, and before Mrs Grant had time to be frightened, or at least to fix her ideas upon any definite shape of fear, he quietly and quickly explained to her the cause of Eleanor's absence; and told her that she had promised to remain for a while with the poor old invalid—who had none but careless, unloving servants to watch over her in the illness which had come upon her with such a sudden stroke. A few questions did Mrs Grant put to him, which he promptly answered, and a few expressions of sorrow and pity escaped her.

"And there is no one in the house with this poor lady but Sir Allan Mountjoy and my niece?"

"No one—but stay, they have sent for an experienced nurse from the hospital."

Mrs Grant drew the shawl in which she had wrapped herself for her night watch more tightly round her shoulders with an air of resolution.

"It is an awkward and responsible position for my niece to be placed in. I will go myself to poor Lady Crampton's."

"You, my dear Madam! I understood that at present you are far from strong yourself?"

"I dare say I can make myself strong enough to do my duty," returned the old lady with an unusual degree of energy. "Bath is Bath, my dear sir, as you must know very well; and what a girl may do from kindness or common humanity may be twisted a hundred ways but the right one. I will go to-night, and take with me something warm for the poor child to put on, instead of that shivering ball-dress, which must look strange enough in a sick-room."

"You are right," said Mr Dillon, rising. "As you remark, Bath is Bath; I will, with your permission, try to find a disengaged fly; you will be ready on my return, and then, if you will allow me, I will escort you to Marlborough Buildings."

"Thank you, thank you, I am sure you are very good; and it is raining, I am so sorry."

"Do n't think of that for a moment. Thank you, I have an umbrella."

Mrs Grant's eyes followed him from the room with a look of gratified surprise. Was this the supercilious, fastidious man of fashion, whom she had been accustomed to regard as the very embodiment of cold, idle selfishness? "That charitable Sir Allan must be right after all," thought she; "he always said that there is a great deal of good in Mr Dillon, and more in most people than we suppose."

But this is no time for thinking. Mary is summoned, and praised for getting the sauce-pan, &c., so adroitly out of the way; and thus mollified, in her own mind she graciously forgives Mrs Grant for the hasty speech, before recorded, and packs up some necessary things in a small box, and is a great comfort to the poor lady, who begins now to feel a little nervous. Then she is persuaded by Mary to

eat some of her sago, quite securely out of sight, in the recesses of her own room. Why she might not have partaken of so simple a preparation, out of a pretty white-and-gold breakfast cup and saucer, resting on the elegant little *papier maché* tray, chosen for such especial purposes by Eleanor, openly in her sitting-room, regardless of the expected return of Mr Dillon, nobody could understand but herself; she had on such little matters ideas and prejudices of her own, which the most learned counsel would fail practically to remove.

"Ret a tet, tet, tet—

Ret a tet, tet—*tet, tet.*"

First a very gentle knock—and at a short interval a very loud one.

Mr Dillon entered, with his self-possessed, composed manner. He had just told Mrs Grant that the fly was ready for them when Mrs George Lonsdale and Flora followed him into the room.

"Oh, my dear Mrs Grant, what a finale

to a ball!" exclaimed Mrs George. "Why, what is this—your bonnet on, and Mr Dillon here?"

"Yes, I am going to Marlborough Buildings."

"You to Marlborough Buildings! My dear, good soul, it will be the death of you. Eleanor is young and strong, and will do very well without you; and she has Sir Allan Mountjoy with her. Some girls enjoy romantic situations like that; depend upon it, she does n't want you. It is perfect madness in you to go. Persuade her, Mr Dillon, to stay at home, and think of herself. Why, everybody at the ball, which of course broke up directly, said how interesting it was to see Sir Allan and Miss Stuart going off with the poor dear old creature. How shocking it was, to be sure! I am so thankful that I was at the other end of the room and saw nothing of it."

"Mrs Grant has resolved upon going," said

Mr Dillon, quietly, "I have a fly now at the door for her."

"Dear, dear; oh, dear, how faint I am, I never, never, *never* shall get over it!" exclaimed Flora, throwing herself upon Mrs Grant's sofa, in a most becoming attitude—with one snowy braceleted arm resting upon her crimson opera cloak, and the other hand pushing back her golden curls from her brow, while her large blue eyes were fixed upon Mr Dillon with a meek, beseeching look, as if trusting in him to restore her to life and strength, and to the power of combating her own sweet, engaging, and excessive sensibility.

Ah, Flora, Flora, for feelings affected, or sorrows real, you must hope no more for sympathy from that master, not of your heart (that was given once, and destroyed in its own falsehood), but of your vanity. At this moment that little old lady, Mrs Grant, in her black silk dress and great cloak—making her

look so thick and square—and her old-fashioned veil tied in such a stifling manner under her chin, is in his eyes a more interesting object than you are—yes, than you, with all your fascinations; houri—peri—goddess, as you have been called to-night; though poor young Snow from Cambridge will go back to his studies with a bewildered remembrance of the unearthly vision of beauty you presented to his unpractised eyes, and will feel, for about ten days or a fortnight, that he can only express his dreary despair by the words,

> "My heart is a handful of dust,
> And the wheels go over my head."

"You are ready, I see—shall we go? I am quite at your service, and so is the fly," said the provoking Mr Dillon, without giving the slightest attention to Flora, lovely and distressed.

"You will call to-morrow morning," said Mrs George, "or I should say this morning;

and bring us the latest news, all that you can gather of the state of poor, dear old Lady Crampton; poor, dear old soul, how I do wish her nephew had persuaded her to stay at home! Poor, dear old creature, one foot in the grave and the other in a ball-room! What a shocking sight! it has really been almost too much for my tender little blossom here; the poor child has been wishing there were such things as Protestant Nunneries, and I can't tell you what, as we were driving home."

"Are you ready?" said Mr Dillon to Mrs Grant, so imperiously as to frighten away the good lady's remaining scruples of politeness, at running away from the occupants of her room, one of whom was professing herself to be unwell.

"Good night, good night, excuse me, excuse me," and she took the arm, rather stiffly offered, for Mr Dillon was impatient of delay, and a something was stirring his not very placable temper that night which made the

presence of Mrs George and Flora scarcely endurable.

"Oh, Mr Dillon," gasped Flora, "good-night;—I do feel so unwell."

"Go to bed and rest, Miss Lonsdale; that is all you require. You have been frightened; to-morrow you will be all right."

And Mr Dillon departed with Mrs Grant, actually vouchsafing to carry her extra shawl and large reticule.

Mrs George started up and gave an imperious order for bed. She offered Flora neither sympathy nor sal volatile. She was out of temper with Mary, who speedily vanished and returned no more,—and with her own maid, who was obliged to remain. She closed the door of her room, after a simple good-night, and Flora was left with the record of her triumphs unspoken, save to her own vanity, and with the haunting remembrance of what had passed between herself and Henry Mordaunt, in whom she had confidently looked for

support and sympathy, and flattering commendation from this worldly friend, whose advice and opinions she had so madly and so weakly followed. Ah! unhappy one, the music and the dazzling light, the revelry and the flattery, have vanished, and you are thrown back upon your own spirit, and you thirst,—and thirsting, you seek your first broken cistern, but in it you find no water!

## CHAPTER XIII.

"Like one in dreary musing mood;
Declining was his attitude;
His head was drooping on his breast,
Fever'd, throbbing, and oppress'd;
There he sat all heavily,
As he heard the night wind sigh."

*The Siege of Corinth.*

A ROOM to himself, at any price, a place to be alone. It was achieved,—and on that gay night, when all Bath was alive with the excitement of the Fancy Ball, Henry Mordaunt sat down in his loneliness, in a private room at the Lion, trying, in mingled confusion and bitterness of spirit, to review that final meeting with

Flora; that crisis which had ended fatally, as he had expected,—nay, as he had intended,—and yet for which he had been unprepared. Some effort to make him think with her, some passionate reproach for his supposed unkindness, some struggle to keep the one true heart without the loss of the admiring crowd, some anxious weighing of himself, and the treasure of his love, against all the blandishments that the world without him could offer; this he had expected, and this he had a right to expect, but even this had been denied,—coldly, heartlessly, had she suffered him to give her up,—and with him could remain no solace of tender respect, or of sorrowful regret.

And if this had been her conduct in that interview which had wounded his pride, even more than his affection, what had been his? Where was that manner, gentle, yet firm, sorrowful, but unswerving, with which he had purposed solemnly to separate himself from the being who, in heart and spirit, could be no

longer his,—when he returned to her that bond of plighted troth which she had virtually cancelled? Where were the admonitions, faithful to the last, which he would have left her, uttered in words which would wring his very heart, but which in future hours might be to her as the bread of a better life, found after many days of fruitless, weary vanity?

Ah! he had parted from her hotly, passionately, hastily, without the legacy that his dying love would have left behind it!

And she, young, inexperienced, courted, had he really understood her? had he been sufficiently patient? had he guarded her as she should have been guarded? had he made all the allowances that should have been made? A moment's weakness, a moment's self-accusation, and then the mood is changed. He had been right, a miserable delusion had been his; he ought to be thankful, he would be thankful that his eyes had been opened before they opened upon the inevitable. A man linked to

a woman who depended upon him for all her firmness and all her strength, and who, if she opposed him, would oppose with all the hopeless obstinacy of untutored folly, better walk on in hermit loneliness for all the days of his life. He had been right, he had been quite right, unquestionably right, and yet what a poor consolation was that; a void had come to heart and mind, a void in all the hopes and aspirations of his earthly career; it seemed as though all real vital energy had been for ever paralysed by the numbing touch of falsehood and of change. And for this state of feeling, at present, there appeared to him no remedy. Deprived of his glad ideal, life, with all its duties and all its relations, lay spread out before him as one long, cheerless blank. Flora could never be restored to the place she had once held in his affections, even if she, sorrowing and repentant, desired it; she had fallen very low beneath his imagined standard, and she could

rise to it never again. Poor Mordaunt, proud and self-confident, even when you deemed yourself most tender and indulgent, you thought that to your happy lot had fallen a being so nearly perfect, that only the finishing strokes of your master-hand were required to make her all that even you could wish for; a material so soft, so gentle, and so yielding, how was it becoming moulded to meet life's sterner duties, as well as to embellish its brighter and gayer hours; and now another hand than yours has fashioned it, and that which the world's insidious touch has shaped will bear the impression long. Alas! alas! must it be even so? must he indeed leave her, to go on in the road that she had chosen, nay, rather, that adverse circumstances had pointed out for her? Poor Flora, sweet, simple flower of Carstone; and the weakness returned to his spirit; he saw her as she had been, not as she was, and that first vision will return to him in hours of after-thought, to darken the present, and to

cast a doubtful gloom over the dawning of any future hope. Ah! woman, woman, in deep humility study well your power to harm, your influence to blight, the gentler susceptibilities and the inward trust of man, and when you find yourself drawing nearer and nearer to the threshold of his heart, pause, and dare not to cross it, till you have read yourself aright, and know that you can be true. Weary of his vacillations of feeling, each in its turn sorrowful and trying, Henry Mordaunt rose from his seat and walked to the window, which looked out into the bustling street, and against which the heavy rain was falling, sounding as a dreary accompaniment to his own troubled thoughts. A stream of carriages appeared to be returning from the Assembly Rooms, and were rattling by, some turning towards the Parades, and others going down Bridge Street, bore back to their homes those who lived in Pulteney Street and its neighbourhood. What a sound of weary vanity it all was to the ears of the grieved young man;

even the heavy private carriages, and flies, and rumbling chairs, seemed to have conspired together, as frivolous, miserable accomplices in the ruin of his heart's best hopes. He had no charity then, no reasonable indulgence, for any in that fashionable crowd, borne by from that wretched scene of vanity which Flora, once his Flora, had deliberately, coldly, wilfully chosen, in cool defiance of his opinion, which had at one time been to her, if even hinted, more powerful than all the oracles of the world's wisdom. Ah! he remembered now how she had at first not only yielded to his wishes, but watched and waited for their expression, as fearing lest her own might differ from his wiser unuttered thought; and how strong and judicious and good he had felt with this meek, loving, obedient scholar by his side.

How great had been his delusion, how frail the foundations upon which his happiness had been built, he could scarce dare to acknow-

ledge even to himself. But she, the Flora whose dawn of life had seemed so bright and cloudless, could he, firmly resolved as he was to seek her never more, could he leave her for ever, harshly as he had seemed to leave her? No, she should in her last thoughts of him esteem the man with whom she had so heartlessly trifled.

So he turned away from his dismal view of the wet and noisy street, with the swiftly-passing vehicles, and the drivers with their shining, dripping overcoats; and the lamps, splashed with rain and casting a flickering, unsteady light as they swayed before the wind, —he turned away from every outward thing, and looking sadly within himself, he wrote earnestly and solemnly some parting words; they cost him an effort, but they were written; kind were his expressions, but they showed no wavering of purpose; deep was his warning, but it set the seal to their separation, and

betrayed no lingering wish for a reconciliation upon any terms.

And his letter was brought up to the weary beauty as she awoke with a feeling of languid, heavy depression, after the double excitement of the night before; and it lay some time on the tray by the side of the breakfast which she vainly tried to eat; and then she read the words of him who had once been all the world to her; her head ached, and her senses seemed confused with weariness, and she only understood how unequivocally their engagement was at an end; a vague sense of dissatisfaction was all that she remembered of the Fancy Ball with all its outward triumph; and it was for this that she had given up the man who, now that he was lost, appeared to rise before her as once he had been at Carstone. He might have written differently, he might have made some allowances, he might have waited for her relenting mood.

And tears of mingled mortification and bitterness were shed by Flora, here in her lonely chamber, now in the reaction of lassitude and depression, ere the draught of vanity and worldly pleasure could again be taken.

## CHAPTER XIV.

"Striving to make an ugly deed look fair."
*Timon of Athens.*

"WELL, I can't say but what it is very much what I expected; I might be said to be in a measure prepared for it. Poor, dear child, she could *not* have acted differently."

Mr Bromley looked up from his new-laid duck's egg, with an expression of inquiry, with which was mingled a shade of dawning displeasure.

"Now, James, you must agree with me

that such a girl as my Flora might do a vast deal better."

"A vast deal better than *what?*"

The polite Rector of Carstone was at present threatened with an attack of gout, and his stock of patience had not for the last few days been quite equal to the demands made upon it by his sister.

Mrs Lonsdale fidgeted about, turning first her right shoulder forward and then her left, feeling not at all easy as to the way in which the intelligence she had to communicate would be received.

"You have heard from Flora?" suggested Mr Bromley.

"Yes; and she, poor dear child, says,—dear me, how does she begin? I have got the wrong side of the paper. Perhaps I had better read you what she says. No; stay, perhaps I had better not."

"As you please. I hope the substance of what she says is that she has yielded to Mor-

daunt's very reasonable wishes, and that she has fixed a day for returning to Carstone."

"No, not exactly: it is not precisely that."

"Then it must be something totally opposite. I will trouble you, Louisa, if you have really anything to say to me, to come to the point: if not, we will drop the subject."

"Oh! this gout," thought poor Mrs Lonsdale.

"You know," she began desperately, as people do when they intend to make right appear on their side, whether it be so or not. "You know that things could not go on as they were. He has shown himself quite the tyrant, and my poor child"—(here she applied her pocket-handkerchief to her eyes)—"my poor child can't stand it. 'If,' she says in her letter (and a more sensible letter I never read),—'if he masters it over me as a lover, what would he be as a husband?' There is a question, James, to be put to a mother! My Flora, though she has been

thought by some people—I name no names—to have nothing but her beauty, is beginning to show herself, I think."

"She is showing herself indeed," said Mr Bromley, sternly; "am I then to understand that she has broken with Mordaunt?"

"Why, he has broken with her. No, no, I don't mean that. She has broken with him; that is, they have broken with each other. Now, James, don't look like that, you flurry me so, that I really don't know what I am saying. You could *not* expect a girl, dressed up to look like an angel, and engaged to dance with more than twenty men at the Fancy Ball, to take off her beautiful dress and put on a brown stuff, and sit down, mim and meek, by the side of the fire at home, and annoy her kind aunt, and offend half Bath, just because Henry Mordaunt came in and ordered her to do it. A pretty life she would have led with him if she had."

"She refused to give up the Ball, and

went to it in open defiance of his wishes? A man in his position had then no alternative but to act as he did. Louisa, I deeply regret the conduct of your daughter, which I forbear to characterize. It is matter of surprise to me that it has not called down upon her a mother's severe reprehension."

"There, James, we differ!" retorted Mrs Lonsdale, testily. "Henry Mordaunt is not half good enough for my daughter, and I have thought so for this long time."

"That is a view of the subject which should have been taken into consideration before she was allowed to accept him. A broken-off engagement is a serious thing, Louisa, a very serious thing indeed; and in order to provide against its occurrence, everything beforehand should be deliberately and most maturely weighed."

"But I thought I was acting for the best at the time, and no human being can do more than that. I think now that it is wrong,

quite dishonourable, for a man to come forward to a girl before she has seen the world and knows her own value. Who could have thought that even she would have been received as she has been in Bath? Why, the Marquis of Donegal told her with his very own lips that she has been talked about more than any lady since the days of Beau Nash. And is such a beautiful girl as that, who, like the Miss Gunnings, might marry a Duke or a Lord, to listen all her life to a man lecturing her if she looks to the right when he expects her to look to the left, and to spend her time over book clubs, and clothing clubs, and coal clubs, and boot clubs, and goodness knows what whims besides that men invent themselves, and take the credit of, and expect their wives to slave and work out for them?"

"If, as you intimate, Flora is either unable or unwilling to coöperate in a husband's plans, whatever they may be, it is indeed better for

Mordaunt that the engagement should be at an end."

"I don't mean that at all, James, and you know I don't; I am not thinking of what is better for him, but of what is best for her, and I am sure that that is what ought to be nearest to a mother's heart," and again the handkerchief was applied to her eyes, a weapon of argument to which Mr Bromley, even more than the generality of men, had, as has been before intimated, a most particular objection.

"I repeat, Henry Mordaunt is not good enough for my Flora, and if you don't see with my eyes, I am sure I can't help it."

"Had he been the most unworthy man who ever aspired to a place in a lady's regard, your daughter, having once accepted him, should have felt it due to herself to have given him up in a manner that would not have militated against her own self-respect. Mordaunt is a man in every way unexceptionable."

The expression "your daughter" had before irritated Mrs Lonsdale; its recurrence here made her altogether lose her temper. It was too provoking to have such a decided judgment pronounced against Flora's conduct, especially as it tallied with some inward misgivings of her own, which had followed the very event she had desired.

"I am sure," she exclaimed, angrily, "if Mordaunt and Eleanor are both so perfect, they had better come together at once. You would have liked that better from the first. My poor child was never appreciated here, but in Bath she has found plenty who know her worth, and she was too wise to give them up at any man's bidding."

"Louisa, you ought to know that I should consider the reversion of no man good enough for my niece. You will, if you please, bear in mind for the future that such an observation as the one you have just made is not admissible with regard to any lady."

Mr Bromley looked so stern that his sister prepared to quit the field, but she tossed her head and looked as unconcerned as she could, hastily drank off the tea over which she had before been fidgeting, and then got up with an abrupt movement, which sent her foot upon the tail of the old cat, whose response was anything but musical. There was a discomfort in the sound, which, trifling as it was, gave as it were the key-note to a train of thought which had been gradually rising in the mind of Mr Bromley. As everybody knows, he was not a man to act hastily, and his plans were always well considered before they found utterance.

He rose, and without another word retired to his study, leaving Mrs Lonsdale very disturbed and irritated, and not half so well inclined to answer Flora's letter as she had felt before sitting down to breakfast. What, if amongst all her Bath admirers there should not after all be so good a match as Henry

Mordaunt? How cruel James had been to look so sternly and doubtingly on her bright visions of Dukes and Lords. How she wished she could rid herself of the respect she had for his judgment, particularly of the effect it was now exercising upon her. A direful reminiscence assailed her of a celebrated Cheltenham beauty she had met in her girlhood, who, after receiving the most pointed attentions from the next heir to a peerage, had ended her fourth season by marrying a plain man from the North of England, who dropped his h's, and was described to her friends as an agriculturist who farmed his own estate.

"What spectre could the charnel send" more hideous than this to the eyes of the weak and scheming mother? For some short time it remained to trouble her, and then it was exorcised by a second perusal of Flora's letter; one portion from which any mind of true feminine delicacy would have shrunk

disgusted, afforded her especial comfort. It was this: "And now, dear mamma, I can only try to forget all that this harsh man has made me suffer, and when you write back I am sure you will agree with me what a nasty, cruel tyrant he would have made if I had married him; and you must not fancy that I shall be at a loss for much better admirers than ever he was *at the best.* My aunt says that she can have little doubt of Mr Dillon's feelings from the way in which he received the news that I am free; and he, as I think I must have told you, has nothing between himself and his uncle's peerage, but a poor, sickly little boy, who, poor little fellow, is threatened with water on the brain."

Here was something tangible in which hope might build its nest; and with her spirits raised and rose-coloured hues again above her horizon, Mrs Lonsdale sat down and wrote a letter which could give pleasure to no one but the vain, deluded girl to whom it was ad-

dressed, though, were it to see the light, it might astonish many.

Ah, pen, powerful for good or for evil—are we sufficiently aware of the force of the weapon we wield when words more effective than those which pass our lips are sent forth with no uttered sound from soul to soul?

Mrs Lonsdale did not meet her brother again until dinner time, and then his manner was extremely courteous. When the footman had retired, and they were left *tête-à-tête* over their dessert, he again brought up the subject of Flora, but now without a word of severity or condemnation; he had already given his opinion, and that was enough, he was not a man to raise, or even to allow, strife and vain argument upon matters about which persons radically differed. He believed that the united wisdom of the seven sages of Greece, could it be joined in his person, would have no lasting effect upon Flora or her mother. Their views were so opposed to his, that, feeling apart, it

would be best for them to act apart. He could not endure, and he would not sanction, the sort of life which he was convinced they would attempt to introduce at Carstone, and for which there would be a daily, and, as they would suppose, concealed contest. In the retirement of his study, he had pictured to himself the weary beauty returning unwillingly to his home after each season of disappointment, ailing from want of excitement, and peevish without flattery.

Flora, under the guidance of Mordaunt, acting under his eye, and believing his opinions to be her own, might have gone through life extremely well, and shown, perhaps, to better advantage than many women of great sense and individual judgment; but Flora, who had wilfully thrown away the sacred Ægis of a happy first attachment, and chosen in her ignorance and blindness to go forth into the battle of life alone, would be a very different person.

Mr Bromley was a far-seeing man, and the

unwary mother had disclosed to him even more of her daughter's character than he had before seen for himself, when she had triumphantly read out passages from her letters from Bath. Not merely had been shown the giddiness and presumption of early youth, — to these Mr Bromley was always indulgent, but a spirit had been revealed, at once calculating and trifling, selfish and inordinate, with an unusual want of refinement of heart, for which the most polished exterior, if she were able to acquire it in her new society, could never compensate. Mr Bromley was not only an epicure of the table— he was an epicure with regard to the associations which daily surrounded him,—he had long wearied of Mrs Lonsdale's inanity and littleness of mind, and he contemplated as intolerable the new element that would be added by the spoiled and flirting Flora. Some may deem that he was bound, in kindness and charity, to have patience, and to use every means to counteract the influences which had surround-

ed Flora, but he was not a man in any way to make a martyr of himself, or patiently to endure any disagreeable thing from which he could find a means of escaping. We paint Mr Bromley simply as he was, without attempting to make him what any one of any mode of thinking may suppose that he ought to be. Let the self-devoted and the self-denying give up time, and health, and comfort, and their own cherished individual hopes, to be repaid in such base coin as misconception, disappointment, and ingratitude, and to see the very course of events take place before their eyes which they have sacrificed so much to prevent; that Mr Bromley yielded to them as the way they chose to take, only his own was a different one, and he claimed the liberty of following it.

In short, he had resolved that, as kindly as he could manage it, he would induce Mrs Lonsdale and Flora to make their permanent abode elsewhere. After all, by one of the fortunate chances of life, they might do what they

would consider something much better for themselves, by being away from Carstone. In a country home they would be always discontented and wishing for that which it could not afford. Besides, the return of Flora now to the near neighbourhood of Steyne and its ill-used Rector, would be anything but desirable. It is scarcely necessary to add that the mind of Mr Bromley was made up; and with this latter consideration he intended to commence operations. Having poured out for his sister a glass of his very best wine, and handed to her a dish of her favourite dates, he began in a cautious, considerate, and artful manner to open the case, being duly prepared, with the kindest and wisest answers, to meet every form of opposition. To his surprise, Mrs Lonsdale very readily agreed with him. She had, in truth, become quite as much tired of his wisdom as he had been of her folly; and ever ready to be discontented with present advantages, she longed for a wider sphere of action,

in which to be known as the enviable mother of the lovely and admired Flora. When Mr Bromley offered some addition to her income, which would enable her to keep up a better appearance, she was quite charmed, and suggested Cheltenham as the place she had been dying to visit, and to which she would take Flora, now that the Bath season was drawing to a close. James was quite right, perfectly right; it would never do to bring back the poor child to Carstone just now, for with her tender heart, it would be too much for her to meet a man, making himself miserable for her sake. It was a pity, a great pity, and ever to be regretted, that she had ever seen his face. But she had nothing to reproach *herself* for, that was one comfort. She could not help Steyne being so near to Carstone, or Henry Mordaunt being made Rector of Steyne. There was no one left in the neighbourhood now but that odious Mr Hollowdean, and he would never marry at all, and would make his wife miser-

able if he did. Had James any idea how much she would have to give for handsome drawing-room apartments at Cheltenham? Mr Bromley suffered her to run on in silence, seeing that there was no call for any of the profound replies he had carefully conned in the recesses of his study. In truth, he was piqued at finding the plan he had himself proposed so eagerly accepted. Some regret from his sister (for she was his sister) at the idea of leaving him, some thought of what might be best for his comfort, some speech in which there might be something of him, and not all of herself and Flora. This he had expected, perhaps, without being aware of it.

Your sage disciples of Rochefoucault and Nicole, the wary searchers into all the lurking places of human selfishness, sometimes wince as much as the most trusting, when their own hearts come in contact with its chilling touch!

## CHAPTER XV.

"Why didst thou listen to Hope's whisper bland?
Or, listening, why forget the healing tale,
When Jealousy with feverous fancies pale,
Jarred thy fine fibres with a maniac's hand?"

COLERIDGE.

"If you please, ma'am, Sir Allan will be very much obliged to you if you will come down and speak to him; he says he will not detain you a minute."

These words were addressed to Eleanor in the low whisper used in a sick room, as she sat keeping watch by the bedside of Lady Crampton, who was quietly dozing.

"Where is Sir Allan?"

"In the dining-room, ma'am."

Eleanor rose immediately and went downstairs. Allan Mountjoy was standing when she entered the room, and his hat and gloves were by his side on the table. Upon his countenance was a gloomy and troubled expression, betokening the presence of that dark mood which would master him of old, and which Eleanor had often combated in days gone by.

"Nothing has happened to disturb you, I trust?" said Eleanor kindly.

"No, nothing—that is nothing that I can explain to you. I have just had a telegram, and I must be off for London immediately. I go of necessity, and from what you told me last night, I can, I believe, go without fear."

"You can, indeed."

"I shall not be many hours away," he added, gloomily. "I am going up by the Express, and I intend, if possible, to be back again by midnight."

"But why hurry yourself so much, since Lady Crampton has been happily pronounced out of danger? She now only requires extreme quiet and careful watching. All this can be done for you, and there is at present no difficult matter of judgment or of action to be laid before you."

"You talk very coolly, and make out my staying away to be a very easy matter. I don't look upon it in that light at all, neither am I the man quietly to leave to others a care and responsibility which more naturally devolve upon myself. I shall, if I can, return by the midnight train."

"As you please," said Eleanor, quietly. "I merely wished you to take with you the assurance that, should your business detain you in Town, you might remain without anxiety. I presume it was for this that you wanted to speak to me."

"Yes, for that precisely; what a passionate, foolish creature I am. Yes, I wanted a pro-

mise from you, which I know is not required, for you will not leave my poor aunt so long as you can aid in restoring her; I shall ever be indebted to you," he continued, with an air of strange coldness, "for your kindness to her. And now I must go, for I am much harassed in mind, and the sooner I am off the better."

"Allan, you alarm me," said Eleanor, gently; "you of course know best, in keeping your trouble to yourself. Whatever it may be, I know that you will meet it bravely, and I sincerely wish it removed."

"Would to heaven that you did." Eleanor's heart began to beat tumultuously, a faint, sick dread came over her, and she moved towards the door.

"I am going back to Lady Crampton now. Don't be late for your train, I expect you will find everybody sitting up on your return."

"I need not go for the next five minutes. Why are you in such haste to be gone? I have

something to tell you, which may grieve,—no, no, I do n't mean that—which may startle you. Now do n't, pray do n't look so alarmed, there is nothing to be alarmed about, I assure you."

But Allan Mountjoy's strange agitation to Eleanor belied his words.

She turned very pale.

" If you have ill news, tell it at once."

" Forgive me—how inexpressibly foolish I have been, thus to frighten you in giving a wrong colouring to what I was going to say. I merely have to tell you what you must have long expected." Here he raised his bright piercing eyes, and looked her steadily in the face. " The engagement between Mr Mordaunt and your cousin is at an end."

Eleanor burst into tears.

A heavy darkness, like a sudden thundercloud, overspread Allan Mountjoy's countenance, and, as if urged by a mad impulse, he exclaimed:

"Tears may have two sources, sorrow or—*joy!*"

The tears were dashed from Eleanor's eyes, her trembling agitation was stilled, and she stood firm and erect before him. "Sir Allan Mountjoy, you have insulted me, and you know it."

Immediately she turned to leave him, but in a moment he was by her side, and seizing her unwilling hand passionately, and almost incoherently, he begged for her forgiveness; and then, ere she could grant the very boon he asked, followed, few and rapid, words that must for ever seal the relationship in which they must hereafter stand towards each other; words that in a breath may change the current of a life-time. Surely they came from his heart, borne away by a power that could not be restrained, or he would scarcely have chosen a moment so untoward both as to time and feeling in which to plead his cause. A brief period that passed as an instant, and his sum-

mons came, and of necessity he was gone; and Eleanor, perturbed and troubled, and in a state of extreme agitation, from which all self-control had departed, could only painfully remember that she had passively received what he had said, and as it were accepted it, but in a way which she knew had sent him from her, damped, unsatisfied, and exquisitely pained.

## CHAPTER XVI.

"I sometimes do believe, and sometimes do not;
As those that fear they hope, and know they fear."
*As You Like It.*

ATTENTIVE, earnest, tender, watchful, with a cheek flushed for awhile, and then as white as marble, Eleanor passed through the long day in faithful discharge of her trust in the sick chamber of Lady Crampton, and there, in the unbroken silence, and almost death-like stillness which surrounded her, she met her heart as it were face to face, and, without parrying or evasion, heard in humble singleness of purpose all it had to demand of her, and

strove to answer it. Not everyone could understand that deep self-communing, perhaps, but very few could sympathize with, or even believe in, the timid doubts, the half-defined scruples, and the misgivings springing from a sense of honour, possibly too highly wrought, which may combat with a delicately sensitive nature, and which, if not openly met and conquered, may interfere so cruelly with its own happiness, and cause it to be much misunderstood of others.

We will not enter into those earnest thoughts which filled the soul of Eleanor so entirely as she kept her silent guard by the feeble old lady's bed.

Once or twice Mrs Grant entered, and kindly and gently offered to relieve her, and give her an opportunity of breathing the free, fresh air, but the aid was declined in such a sweet but decided way that it was not insisted upon.

"Poor child, she is thinking, I know she is;

and she is glad of a reason to be alone;" so guessed Mrs Grant, and she withdrew and left her undisturbed, and did herself what she had recommended to Eleanor,—that is, she went out and paced quietly up and down the Royal Crescent; dispensing with a chair, for she could walk now with a strength that she had not felt in the dreary winter months. Up and down she paced, enjoying the sunshine, which if it comes anywhere is sure to visit that favoured spot, and thinking entirely of Eleanor, whose totally altered mood and abstracted silence since her interview with Sir Allan had greatly added to those surmises and conjectures which had been previously awakened by her careful watchfulness for her niece's happiness.

"I see how it is," thought the poor lady, who did not invariably take the most sanguine view when a darker presented itself. "I see how it is, Allan Mountjoy (or Sir Allan, as, correcting herself, she called him at that mo-

ment, even to herself, because he seemed removed from her so entirely) has come forward and been refused, all on account of a foolish, romantic remembrance of a shilly-shallying, not-know-his-own-mind sort of a man, who is not worthy of five minutes' thought from her. How I wish it could have been otherwise; I feel I could have been as proud of Sir Allan as if he had been my own son. Ah! some girls are doomed to be unfortunate in these matters, and Eleanor is one of them. Of course it is all for the best, and all right, as everything is, but it will be a sore trouble to me, to see her spending her life here with only me when she could satisfy any man's heart and adorn any station. But things go wrong with her somehow, I see they do."

Here she stopped to take breath, and fixed her eyes sadly on a beautiful japonica in full bloom which covered the area wall of one of the houses, and whose glorious crimson brightness, in the full light of the sunshine, might

have been suggestive, to a mind not preöccupied, of the most gladsome impressions.

"Well, of all things, here you are; I was just going to the house to leave my card, and inquire for you and Miss Stuart."

"Ah, Mr Curtis, how do you do? How you startled me, to be sure."

"I am sorry for that, ma'am, but I can't think why you should be startled at the sight of me, when you know I am in Bath, and likely to turn up at any moment."

"Why, Mr Curtis, you must excuse me, it is only my nerves, and of course you don't know anything about such things."

"Don't I, with Mrs Curtis at home? Why, if I did not, any schoolboy who was as slow over his grammar as I should have been in the art of nerves, would get many a flogging, I promise you. But tell me, how are you getting on in there? and how is the poor old lady?"

"Out of danger, and ordered to be kept very quiet. Eleanor is sitting with her."

"Just like her, sure to be anywhere where any good can be done, but you must not let her keep still too long; she should come out, and refresh herself."

"I tried to persuade her to do so, but she would keep to her watch."

"And what do you all think of this engagement?"

"What engagement?"

"Why, the breaking of it off, I mean."

Mrs Grant looked surprised.

"What! is it possible that you don't know what all Bath is talking about?—that all is at an end between the pretty *belle* and her lover?"

"If you are speaking of Flora Lonsdale and Mr Mordaunt, I am sorry for it, but not at all surprised," replied Mrs Grant, with no small severity of tone.

"Well, most people say just half what you

do. Nobody seems at all surprised; but as for being sorry, why, it seems to me that in Bath nobody is ever really sorry at anything but his neighbour's good luck."

Mrs Grant did not tax him with his want of charity, but while he continued by her side she walked on in silence, pondering upon what he had told her.

"I have vexed you, I am afraid, by coming out with the news at once, but as you are connected, or something of the sort, with Miss Lonsdale, I thought, of course, that you knew all about it."

"Being away from Rivers Street has kept us in the dark as to what was going on there. I was a little surprised at Flora not coming to see us."

Mr Curtis smiled.

"Well, I can tell you for your comfort that the young lady's spirits are not much affected. She has been dancing every night, excepting one, and then she was at the play."

"I can only say that I am very sorry to hear it," said Mrs Grant, with some dignity and a little stiffness, for though she disapproved of Flora as much as anybody could, she felt it right to put a stop to much discussion of her conduct in her presence.

An open carriage, drawn by two fine greys, whose sleek coats glistened in the sunshine, passed them. Mrs George Lonsdale had gratified an old wish of Mrs Grant's; she had found another friend with different livery from that of poor old Lady Crampton, and in her fashionable new Easter bonnet, from which drooped the most becoming of feathers, she was now seated by that friend's side; on the back seat, in a bonnet of the most delicate pink, was Flora, radiant with smiles, and listening with pleased attention to the speeches of Mr Florian Lepel. To look at her you would have thought her a creature too young, and bright, and guileless to have ever wilfully given a pang to any human heart. The carriage stopped at Lady

Crampton's door. Mrs Grant and her companion were near enough to see the cards handed to the footman, and to hear the inquiries made in due ceremonious form, for the friend who had been a little while ago so courted and caressed; and the street door had scarcely closed before a light laugh from Flora fell upon their ears, which seemed to express great amusement at some observation made by the flattering beau at her side. The carriage turned, and the gay party encountered Mrs Grant and Mr Curtis. Immediately all faces assumed an air of the most serious concern, the carriage was stopped, and Mrs George, leaning from it in one of her most graceful attitudes, expressed to Mrs Grant her distress about dear Lady Crampton, and the anxiety daily felt by herself and Flora, as to the effect that so much watching might have upon her own health, and that of their dear Eleanor. "In fact," she added, "I was most anxious to-day to beg to be admitted to see her, and judge for myself

how she is looking, but it is *so* unfortunate, we have not a minute to spare, as I have been so detained by callers, a perfect shoal of them one after the other, and now we are off to the Rooms, having taken tickets a whole fortnight ago, to be secure of hearing that inimitable Arabella Goddard, and really one can safely take one's anxiety for a friend to a place where such high-souled, scientific music is to be heard."

"You need not let anxiety interfere with your amusement," returned Mrs Grant, dryly; "Lady Crampton is out of danger, and will, we hope, do well, though she must be kept from all excitement for a long time."

"So the man told me, and sincerely glad we were to hear it."

"Don't you think —," here Flora stopped with a pretty blush, in a speech she was preparing to make.

"Think what, my dear love?" said Mrs George, encouragingly.

"That it would do Eleanor good to go to the concert, instead of me, and I could sit with poor Lady Crampton while she is away?"

"Just like the dear child," whispered Mrs George to her new and influential friend, Mrs Roundell Farmer, a lady of rather strict notions with regard to the relative duties of others, and a professed admirer of unselfishness.

Instead, however, of the look of approbation Flora expected, Mrs Roundell Farmer's countenance exhibited as much annoyance as politeness would permit, at a suggestion which, if carried into effect, would make the whole party late at the Rooms.

"Pray," pleaded Mr Lepel, "do not, Miss Lonsdale, make us the martyrs to your angelic unselfishness; if you do n't go I shall certainly throw my own ticket down into that area as a plaything for old Miss Dobson's kitten."

"You may safely take it to the Rooms," said Mrs Grant, trying not to show how much piqued she really felt. "I can answer for Miss Stuart that she could not be induced to leave Lady Crampton to-day."

Mrs Roundell Farmer bowed politely. She was rather struck with Mrs Grant's manner of declining, without thanks, a proposal which deserved none. With expressions of regret from Mrs George, who trusted to be more fortunate another time, &c. &c., the carriage drove on, leaving good Mrs Grant much more annoyed than a wise woman ought to have been, at the look of pretty conceit on Flora's face while listening to the commendations of Mr Lepel for having made an offer which nobody could have accepted.

"A set of precious humbugs some of your Bath people are, to be sure," exclaimed Mr Curtis, "but they don't trouble me a bit now, since I have learnt to see through them; and Miss Stuart taught me a great deal to-

wards knowing how to do that; I wish she could open Mrs Curtis's eyes as well."

"People must open their own eyes, Mr Curtis, and perhaps we may be sometimes the happier for keeping them shut."

"Now, ma'am, asking your pardon, I don't quite agree with you; I think, as Sir Allan Mountjoy said, truth is truth, and the sooner we know it the better."

The mention of Sir Allan's name brought back to Mrs Grant the feelings of regret with which she had commenced her walk.

"I think I must say good-bye now, Mr Curtis," she said, suddenly, "my walk has tired me a little."

"Sorry to hear it, sorry to hear it, allow me to ring for you? Yes, yes, I will do it very gently. I say," he added, turning round after he had parted from her, "Miss Flora does not look as if she were breaking her heart exactly, eh?"

## CHAPTER XVII.

"On the rack of fear
Suspend me not,—I would my sentence hear,
Would learn my fate."—CRABBE.

"No, it cannot be all at an end, because, if it were, though sad, she would not look so perplexed, she would not go on thinking as if she were talking to herself." So thought Mrs Grant, hopefully, as she watched Eleanor through the evening. She was not annoyed at any seeming want of confidence. She trusted and knew that at the proper time it would be given, if, in fact, there was any to give.

She was moved by Eleanor's soft, sweet

tones when she addressed her, and by the wistful, tender looks which at times met hers. A something had passed, she felt assured, which was stirring the very depths of the spirit within her, but she did not even look an inquiry, and as the day drew to a close, a sort of silent understanding grew more and more between those two, and the one gave a sympathy without words, while the other received a comfort which from it insensibly stole upon her. There are times, and they are not confined to the hours of prostrating affliction, when we bless the silence of our friends, and are more grateful to them for it than we should have been even for the choice words which are as "apples of gold in pictures of silver."

Late in the evening Mrs Grant, who did not like the lonely gloom which hung over the house down-stairs (where she had rung the bell two or three times under various pretences, just for the sake of seeing the servant who came to answer it), brought her book up-stairs,

and sat in the little dressing-room adjoining Lady Crampton's bed-room, where, with the door open, she felt she had some sort of companionship with Eleanor, who was attending to the wants of the invalid, who, upon recovering consciousness, seemed restless and unhappy if any hand but hers supplied them. That eager longing for real attachment which had haunted her through life, seemed now very strong upon her, and Eleanor, so quick to perceive the feelings of others, was touched by it with the tenderest pity. We can scarcely help loving those we tend and watch over, and Eleanor began to give to this poor spirit, in its stricken hour, that for which it had craved so long.

"Allan loves me, I hope you will love me too, my dear, if you can," murmured the feeble voice of the invalid, when Eleanor gave her her sleeping draught.

A gentle pressure of the poor shrivelled hand, which lay on the coverlid, was the only reply.

There are moments of agitated feeling, when we may be deeply affected by that which at another time would have a slighter effect. Eleanor's eyes overflowed with tears, the tears which had not been shed through all that anxious day, and she turned aside from the bed to hide them. The nurse, who came to relieve her watch for the last part of the night, now entered the room, and she was glad of the opportunity of leaving it. So, after a few whispered comments upon the state of their patient, she passed on into the dressing-room.

"What, are you up, dear aunt, so late? I hoped you had gone to bed."

"No, my child, I waited to give you a comfortable cup of tea; I have it here all ready, and you can take it quite quietly without disturbing poor Lady Crampton; sit down, my dear, for I am sure you must be exhausted, as you have eaten very little all day."

Eleanor did sit down — that is, she sank down upon the footstool that was at Mrs

Grant's feet, and rested her head upon her lap as a wearied child might have done.

As Mrs Grant softly stroked her hair, giving a few whispered words of tenderness, the tears which she had before restrained flowed silently and freely.

The kind old lady asked for no explanation, but let them flow; and when they had brought relief to that strange inward agitation, whose cause she could only conjecture, she gave her some tea where she sat, and persuaded her to eat, with that sort of earnest kindness which, in some moments, goes to the heart more than at another time would even a substantial benefit.

As thus they sat, the outer door was noiselessly opened, and a maid-servant on tip-toe crossed the room.

"I did not knock, ma'am, for fear my lady should hear," she whispered. "Sir Allan is come back, ma'am, and has sent you this—I am to wait and take an answer."

Eleanor took the note which the girl handed to her, and hastily read :—

"I am returned, and I hear that you have not yet retired. Pardon my impatience, but I *must* see you to-night, nay, I feel that I have a right to ask you to remove the strange and miserable uncertainty which has haunted me all through the day. In my present state of mind I dare not say more,—I only entreat you to see me.

"ALLAN MOUNTJOY."

Eleanor tore off the blank sheet and wrote a few words in pencil, which she gave to the servant, who departed.

"Dear aunt," she said, rising from her place at the old lady's feet, "he wishes to see me to-night, and, strange as the request may appear to you, I must grant it."

"Not to-night, my child; no, not to-night. You are pale and tired, and not yourself.

Wait till to-morrow, and then you will see things more clearly and understand yourself better."

"Dearest aunt, let me go; I shall never know myself better than I do at this moment. I could never leave a man to feel till the morning light as he is feeling now. Suffer me to act as I wish to-night, and to-morrow, whatever be the issue, you too shall know all my heart."

She stooped down and kissed her, and then, not trusting herself to say more, she left the room.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"What in my secret soul is understood,
My heart shall utter—"

POPE'S *Homer.*

"You are come then; so far indeed I thank you. You are come to answer—"

"Nothing, save your unspoken thoughts. Spare me the question that is upon your lips, and give no expression to the doubt that has long been in your heart, and which should have kept us friends, and friends only. Have pity now upon yourself and me, and help me."

"Help you to what, Miss Stuart?"

"So to speak that we may part as those

should part who esteem each other so highly."

"For suspense then you would give me despair; if you had intended the latter, you might through all this miserable day have spared me the former."

"I asked you to help me, Allan; I have no easy task before me."

"Pardon me; the sending away from you hopeless the man you had allowed to dare to hope, is a difficulty of your own making. From such deliver yourself."

"Be it so," said Eleanor firmly, gaining the courage she wanted from the very severity of his speech.

She moved forwards and seated herself in a low easy chair, with a sort of calm and sorrowful dignity; a full light from the chandelier fell upon her dark hair, her countenance pale as marble, and her deep, lustrous eyes, in which lay an expression of mingled truthfulness and pain.

"Only aid me now by your silence," she said softly; "only listen to me while I explain what you think you have a right to consider trifling or inconsistent. Let your noble heart suspend its judgment till it has known all mine."

He stopped the rapid, agitated strides he was making up and down the room, as had been his habit, when under vehement emotion, from a boy; and he stood at a short distance from her, with folded arms, compressed lips, and half-averted face; mastering his stormy excitement indeed at her entreaty, but only to change it to a bearing stern in its very sorrow; and giving the attention she asked, but in a manner in which there could be no encouragement to the speaker, as it was that of one prepared to listen to that which could give him no satisfaction, and from which he had no hope of comfort.

Twice Eleanor attempted to speak and failed; one word of any kind from him would

have helped her, but it came not; he was simply obeying her, and waiting, with a sort of indignant despair, for some miserable, unanswerable reason to fall from her lips, which must drive him from her, not indeed to give up the great objects of life, not to shrink from the difficulties with which he had learnt to grapple bravely, or to turn from responsibilities which he now received humbly but without reluctance; not to give up the laudable ambition, which had long been stirring the very soul within him, to arise and exert all its faculties and rouse all its powers for the good of others and for his own; not any of these would her cruel sentence work; it could not send him away from her as a coward, to lie down, as too many have done, stricken by one great sorrow, by the way-side of life, weary before their time; no, aught of this he told himself, even in his heartfelt bitterness, it should not do. And the thought, like a quick lightning flash, passed through his mind, in

the pause of intense pain which followed Eleanor's earnest request that he would listen to her. But what would it bring, or rather what must it take away? The heart, so often made desolate since man first began to live and hope, alone can answer that question.

Yet another effort, and she succeeded, and in a voice low and gentle, but unfaltering as it gained firmness from the very intensity of her own emotion and her compassion for his, Eleanor spoke at last. Openly, truthfully, and most delicately did she touch upon all the past, such as it had been to her; and clearly did she meet what she had long perceived to be the haunting suspicion of him who had at length confessed the feelings which she knew he had often striven to crush for ever. She told of that which had been known to her own heart only; of the feeling which had been, but which had wholly and entirely passed away. She spoke to him as spirit might speak to spirit, were every mask removed. She told

him that without this avowal, which some would think uncalled-for, and even absurd, it would have been impossible for her to be happy with one who had told her that, from his strange boyhood, through all the startling changes of his fate, his thought had ever been of her alone.

With a mingled lowliness and dignity she spoke; the lowliness of one who had come down from the high pedestal upon which his worshipping veneration had once placed her, the dignity of one who had done so voluntarily, and who would not allow him to deceive himself with regard to her, even in his thoughts. And up to this point there was no change in Allan Mountjoy's attitude, and no word broke from his lips; only the breathless attention, and the rigid, unmoving form. "Allan," she concluded, "I have shown you the barrier between us; it would be to many an unreal and shadowy one, but it is that which one

of your peculiar temperament had better not attempt to pass. I would not make you unhappy even by a thought of that which has passed away for ever, and is become even as though it had never been. You will forgive me now that you know what has influenced my behaviour to you, and made me appear as changeable and inconsistent as for some time you have shown yourself towards me. Let us part, but I beseech you let it be in acquitting and esteeming each other still and ever."

Allan turned his before averted face full towards her, and in his eyes there was a flash of almost unearthly brightness.

"Eleanor, is this all? Does nothing lie between us but the dead and buried past? You are truth itself. Answer me only this."

"Yes—this is all."

His arms were thrown around her, and he clasped her firmly, closely to his heart, in a

deep and speechless gratitude, such as is felt by the before despairing watcher, when the best beloved of earth is restored from the very jaws of death.

## CHAPTER XIX.

"Silent joy brightened in her face, as when the shadows fly from the fields of spring; the blue stream is rolling in brightness, and the green bush bends over its course."—OSSIAN.

THE glad spring sunshine gloriously irradiated the Royal Crescent; its broad pavement, and well-kept areas, made cheerful, here and there, by elegant creepers, or the glossy, bright green leaves of the magnolia, lay bathed in a flood of light, while the sward below wore that soft, delicate tint peculiar to grass in spring, which seems to the poetical eye to be the very hue of Hope's mantle thrown lightly upon the

earth. Lower still appeared flowering shrubs, and graceful young trees, waving in a very gentle breeze, and showing that fair outline of half-developed beauty, and that pure freshness of foliage to be seen only in the season of promise, that season which to the glad, unclouded spirit seems to bring heaven upon earth,—that season which leads the broken-hearted to look forward to the eternal renovation of all things in the unchanging world beyond the grave. By an open window sat Eleanor Stuart, not so much marking the beauty of all outward things, which seemed on that bright morning to court each human eye, as feeling its influence surrounding her, and bringing a sweet and grateful tranquillity to still the tumult of gladdened feeling within her. A few short hours, and how changed was all to her; how different the present, how wholly altered the future which now lay before her, as rich in hope as the gladsome earth itself. And this was hers, this

present and this hoped-for future, this heart, strong, loving, firm, and true, the high principle which could never disappoint the manly effort which, crowned with success, or honourable even in failure, would fill her heart with tender esteem and joyful pride. Hers too was all that the world might envy, if it could not appreciate that which to her was priceless beyond all outward advantages. Yes, she was blessed indeed, blessed as she had not deserved to be. Prosperity is a touchstone as well as adversity; both can bring our sins to our remembrance, as all who have striven to know themselves aright must at some time have felt. Humbly in this hour, which some would deem could be filled with nought but brightness, did Eleanor recall of mind things long repented of, her impatience and pride of spirit under trial, her want of forbearance towards others, her late finding of that resignation and grateful acquiescence in all the events of life, untoward as they may

often seem, which had come to her as the most priceless of blessings, and which would not have forsaken her, had the issue of this great crisis in her life been other than it was. Reader, whosoever thou art, believe this, that the earthly blessing which we shall be permitted most richly to enjoy is that which we could have resigned.

Allan Mountjoy, at this moment how full of gratitude and pride and gladness you are, thinking of the inestimable treasure you have won, she who is to you as an angel of goodness, only the dearer for having with such a lowly majesty owned her only imperfection in your eyes. Depend upon it, could you now read her heart clearly, as she allowed you to read it when you dreaded the perusal as you would a sentence of death, you might be assured that she, who is judging herself so humbly and so deeply, will only come forth from that judgment the better fitted to walk gladly by your side in all your prosperous hours, to be

the brightest gem to adorn success and triumph, should such be yours, and to be the strengthening and consoling spirit in the times of darkness, from which the brightest earthly lot cannot be free.

## CHAPTER XX.

———"And one bright gleam
Of setting life shone on her evening hours:
Not less enraptur'd than the happy pair."

THOMSON.

"MY child, my child, how happy you have made me; I am now the very happiest woman in all Bath, or in the world itself, I do believe. Go on, my dear, go on, and tell me all you choose to tell, but you can say nothing to make me happier than I am."

Here good Mrs Grant put her handkerchief to her eyes, to wipe away the tears that were freely flowing.

She was thanked in low tones by the tearful

Eleanor, who was again sitting on the low stool at her feet, with one of her hands in hers, telling her of the great, momentous change which had come over her life since yesterday's sun went down. Solemn words were those which had at first passed between the aunt and niece; words of deep and grateful love from Eleanor, mingled with earnest regret and self-reproach for all that might at one time have been wanting in what she should ever have been to her. When any relationship of life is about to be altered, do we not feel as the dying feel, full of compunction for much that we have done, and more still that we have left undone? Never perhaps do we feel more sorrowful for having cast even a passing shadow upon the path of others, than when the glorious sunlight is shining on the way before us in its fullest brightness.

"You have never been anything to me but the one object in life of which I have been most proud," was the fond assurance of Mrs Grant;

"and to see you happy has been the one thing I have hoped for on this side the grave. There are trials which come to the young, which the old ought not to forget; and pardon me, my dear, if I say that I have understood you so well that I ought to have supported you better; and so, if any one is to blame it is myself, but I am not going to suffer any such thing to vex me now, for I am far too happy for anything of the kind, and if you don't make yourself so too, I shall begin to scold, and to think that the faults you have been curing so much that you have been making me love you better every day, are coming back again,—especially your pride, for it is too proud of any sinful mortal to hope to stand under all circumstances and to pass through every trial unscathed. Don't think me severe, my child; I have heard from a man, much wiser than myself, that no one can be happy who would soar above human nature, and that when we fall, the best way is to rise very humbly, and

take full time to cleanse our garments from the dust or the mire, and then to walk on more circumspectly than ever; never sure but that in this slippery world, full of snares and pit-falls, we may fall again. This is to comfort you, if you are judging yourself, dear child, for I have no cause to judge you, and I am only thankful that such precious company should have been given to me so long; and more thankful still that it will be removed to a sphere where it will be appreciated as it deserves to be."

A frequent pressure of the hand she held was Eleanor's comment upon what her aunt was saying, and when she stopped, as the good lady did, to wipe her eyes again, she answered her in a tone of gentle humility:

"You have spoken as wisely, as kindly—I will never forget what you have said, and I believe in my heart that it will do me good all through my life."

She paused after saying this, and remained

so deep in thought, that for some little time Mrs Grant allowed her to be silent, undisturbed. But this could not be for very long, for the happy and highly satisfied are eager to discuss the event that pleases them in all its bearings; and now Mrs Grant, having fully entered into Eleanor's own feelings, and over and over again expressed her full approbation of her choice, wanted to talk of her favourite Allan; discussing him and the constantly increasing good impression he had made upon her from the time when she had been startled and made so nervous by his first appearance in Rivers Street, up to her melancholy pacing up and down the broad pavement of the Crescent the day before; when she had sadly feared that with all his good qualities (increased to her tenfold by that very fear) he would be lost to them for ever. "You are both so particular and both so high-flown, my dear," she said, "that I expected you would have flown somewhere out of each other's way, and made

each other miserable all through your lives about nothing. I have long seen that he worshipped the very ground you walked upon, for he is far too honest and straightforward to put a mask before his face, as some of the precious Bath men do here, and simper behind it six months to one girl, and at the end of the season throw it away, and come forward to another."

"Still, my dear aunt, I know that he would not approve of your praising him at the expense of his neighbours," said Eleanor, smiling. "You know how often he has lectured me for being uncharitable to the people of Bath, and how wrong he said it was to be prepared to condemn any set of people because they happen to live in any particular place."

"That is all very well, but he does not know Bath as well as I do; and I was thinking of that Mr Lepel, whose very sight makes me sick—such a contrast as he is to a manly, strong, high-principled, clever creature like

the man I shall be so proud to call my nephew, one who thinks it vastly more worth his while to help the feeble steps of an old woman than to turn the head of a young one. That is the sort of husband I shall die happy to see you with, my child; one whose principle would keep him to his duty to you, even if it were possible (and men, my dear, the best of them, are queer, fickle creatures!) that his affection for such a being as you could change."

Deeply moved, Eleanor rose and kissed her. "No more now, dear aunt, no more of him just now, I can scarcely bear it," she whispered.

"But one more thing I must say, and it has been upon my tongue for the last five minutes. Why has he run off to-day?—why to-day of all days? It is the only thing about him that I have not liked."

"He ran off, as you call it, because I would not suffer him to stay when his presence was necessary for the good of another. This

day of all others he would not stain with selfishness. He goes to Mountjoy to finish the matter which took him to London yesterday. He will soon be here; on his way back he will go to Carstone, as he wishes in person to tell my uncle, whom he esteems so highly, that —"

"I see, I see, you need not say any more; he does right, as he always does, and you, as you always will, are helping him to do it."

"Now I must go to Lady Crampton, while you write your letter. How much better she is to-day!"

"Yes, everything is better," said Mrs Grant, gaily; "it seems to me now that nothing can go wrong, but I must not talk in that presumptuous way. Mend me one of your nice pens, my dear, and I will write to your uncle, while the daylight lasts."

Cheerfully and readily did Mrs Grant begin the pleasing task of giving an account of her own satisfaction to Mr Bromley, in a letter full

of the praises of Eleanor and of Allan Mountjoy; she cared little what she said, or how she said it. When we are pleased, how readily do our ideas rise, how instantly are they clothed in words; there is then no sad pause of deep consideration, as when we have ill news to communicate, no perplexed thought followed by dissatisfaction with all we say, and any form in which we say it!

Though her whole mind and feeling went with what she was writing, how graciously did Mrs Grant receive all interruptions from cards and messages of inquiry for Lady Crampton which were brought to her,—and so full and courteous were her replies, that they infused an air of even more than ordinary politeness into the manner of the footman as he bore them down-stairs,—and added to the opinion that he had privately condescended to form, that the new friends of his poor old mistress were quite ladies of the right sort, and very nice ladies indeed!

## CHAPTER XXI.

"The world has won *her* with its tempting store,
Of needless wealth and that has made *her* poor,
Success undoes *her*; she has risen to fall,
Has gained a fortune and has lost *her* all."

*The Convert.*

ALONE, and venturing to frown and look fretful because she was alone, sat the pretty Flora, in the gay drawing-room in Rivers Street. She was weary and listless, as she now habitually felt if left even for a short time to her own resources for amusement. It was the middle of the day, just after lunch, a time perhaps of all others the most trying to those who cannot look back upon a morning well spent, or forward to relaxation and exercise

well earned. She had been quite twenty long minutes left to herself,—no welcome double knock had resounded through the house,—no note had been brought in, giving a promise of future pleasure, or rather of excitement bearing its name, for, early as it was in her life, for Flora the first fresh flowers of her spring had already faded; from the cool, sequestered spot where they might long have bloomed, the rude hand of the world had gathered them, and at its first touch they had begun to wither.

"How sunny it is," she thought, and with a look of peevish discontent she rose and pulled down a blind.

She took up the Bath *Chronicle*, and tried to read it, but could not; it looked very dull now to what it had done. There were now scarcely any announcements of public amusements, for the season was on the wane, and in the delightful column where the Fancy Ball, with its gay promises, and other satellite balls, had figured so brightly, there were now notices to the

public that Messrs So-and-so would sell by auction, &c.

What a melancholy change; her eye turned from it in languid disgust. Unfortunately the "inward eye" could look upon nothing brighter. What indeed could be more dispiriting than the vision that rose before it? At Mrs Brignall's, the night before, had appeared a girl never seen in Bath before. She had (so Flora had said, and Mrs George had quite agreed with her) flaxen hair, much too pale, blue eyes without any expression, and she produced the general effect of a tolerably pretty, and very insipid-looking doll, who had not a word to say for herself. But with all these disadvantages, which must have been evident to any one who had any discernment at all, this Miss Mary Wagner (that was her odious name, and she had come from Glasgow, or some such far-away place, where she had much better have remained) gained much more attention than she could possibly deserve. Mr Lepel had sat

by her side for one-third of the evening, and Mr Dillon had actually not heard something that Flora had said to him, because he was looking languidly through his eye-glass at Miss Wagner, and considering whether she was not a little like his cousin, the admired young Countess of Roden.

Ah, Flora, those who are satisfied with the love of one true heart can never fear a competition; but those who trust to the admiration of the world must have the mortification of seeing rivals come forth, and follow each other in as constant a succession as the bloom of one flower of the summer parterre succeeds another!

"Ret a tet, tet, tet, *tet*. Who can that be?"

"Anybody better than nobody," thought the weary-spirited Flora, who felt that the dullest person in all Bath could not be as irksome to her as her own self had been.

"Now," said Mrs George, quickly making her appearance, "that sounds like Mr Lepel's

knock, and remember, Flora, that you don't meet him in the same manner that you parted from him last night. Never let a man see that you notice his not being as attentive as usual. Men are very quick to give themselves airs, if you condescend to give them importance; and mind," she added in a whisper, for steps were heard upon the stairs, "not one word in disparagement of Miss Wagner."

"Sir Hugh Barton,—Mr Lepel."

A most cordial reception from Mrs George, and smiles from Flora, forced into existence as quickly as the plant of an Indian juggler, and the two gentlemen were seated.

"We met Dillon in Gay Street just now, and thought we should have found him here," observed Sir Hugh Barton.

"Did you only come here to see him?" asked Flora, coquettishly.

"We do need some excuse for wearing your door-steps so constantly," said the ever ready

Mr Lepel; "Miss Lonsdale is very merciful to furnish us with one."

"But we do n't want one to-day," exclaimed Sir Hugh, with even more than usual of the confident manner habitual to him. "We are the bearers of news, and such I believe are privileged to be welcome everywhere, in this charmingly philanthropic city, where all that concerns our neighbours is so deeply interesting."

"Naughty man," said Mrs George, "scold him, my dear, as he deserves, and tell him that we do n't care a bit about his news, and that he may keep it all to himself."

"Because you know it already, eh, Mrs Lonsdale? Of course it is but natural that you should; I do n't know much of Miss Stuart, but enough to make me wish her every happiness; and as for Sir Allan Mountjoy (we must not call him the King of the Huns any longer now, Miss Lonsdale), Dillon says that

he is as good a fellow as ever stepped, and that he is sure to make a woman of sense happy."

What was this? what was he saying? A miserable dizziness came over Flora; unhappy girl, the sharp tooth of envy in an instant was gnawing at her heart. After all her own triumphs, was Eleanor to bear away the richest prize in Bath? The thought was intolerable, and all that supported her was the hope that this report, like many others floating about Bath at the end of the season, might not be true.

Oh, vanity, some may deem you a harmless soil, but while you have no depth of earth in which the germs of high and noble things may take firm root, over your surface will spread too rapidly the poisonous, noxious weeds whose taste is bitter as death! With dubious smiles that might mean everything or nothing, and which might afterwards be interpreted as she chose, either into confirmation or contradiction of the truth of what Sir Hugh Barton asserted, did the clever Mrs George receive his statement,

putting on an appearance of amiable and delicate reserve, to hide her total ignorance of what might or might not have been passing under Lady Crampton's roof. It required a less quick eye than hers to perceive the alarm and mortification that had spread over Flora's face, before so sweetly smiling.

"My dear," she said, as if struck with a sudden thought, "how careless I have been. Might I trouble you to go and answer Lord Donegal's note for me? You will find it in my dressing-room; just write a word to say that we shall be at the Institution at the time he proposed. You must excuse her, poor child, while she kindly goes to make up for her aunt's carelessness, who is getting old, I suppose, which must be her excuse."

And Mrs George smiled benignantly, in a new cap which her milliner had told her was the most becoming she had ever made for her.

Amidst the disclaimers which of course

followed from Mr Lepel, the poor child went, —poor indeed, for she was becoming an adept in the school of deception; she understood that Mrs George wished her to leave the room, and she left it, but she knew quite well that Lord Donegal's note had been duly answered as soon as received; and she also knew that her aunt's lodgings in Rivers Street admitted of no dressing-room; but that was a minor point, not worthy of a thought. To her own room Flora retired, where she shut and bolted the door, as if in so doing she could shut out from her many admirers any suspicion of her heart's bitter envy and pitiable weakness.

The rising star of Miss Wagner now disappeared before the certain fate of Eleanor, of the cousin she had once envied, and then tried to despise when she found her spending her life in what appeared to be unmarked obscurity with her old aunt, and her aunt's old maiden friends, in the gloomy parlour below,— that room into which it seemed impossible

that anything bright or hopeful could ever enter. And now she, the beautiful Flora Lonsdale, the admired of all beholders, never stirring without *beaux* in her train, the bright meteor that (so Flora thought) every eye longed to see, found herself, at the end of the season, substantially not so well off as she had been at the beginning. Of all her adorers, if the sad truth must be known, not one had craved the privilege of being allowed to adore her in perpetuity; of all the marked attentions she had received, not one had ended in a proposal. Two very plain sisters from the country, one of whom had been laughed at by Mr Lepel for saying that some better plan ought to be invented for eating the Habbey, had both been married last week, and the same Mr Lepel had accepted, with great pleasure, an invitation to the double wedding, where he enjoyed himself very much, and presumed afterwards to say that the brides were very sensible and ladylike, just the sort of girls to make good wives.

Two or three other unpretending creatures, who had been scorned by the reigning beauty, as they sat without worshippers in obscure corners, or could only depend upon their papas' arms to conduct them to supper, had suddenly risen into importance, and been talked about for a day or two, at the end of which a gay wedding, in which they acted the principal part, had made a lively excitement in their immediate localities, and caused the heart-stirring and sadly sweet music of the church bells to be heard over the city, and upon the heights where the musing lover of nature paused to rest his eyes upon the lovely scenes around and beneath him.

A woman had better be admired too little than too much; but this is an assertion made in vain, since it contains a truth with which the neglected will not console themselves, nor will the worshipped, while for a fleeting season upon their dizzy eminence, take it to heart. Eleanor Stuart,—who had sat at home in quiet,

out of the way of the elegant butterflies of Bath, while she, Flora (after condescending to show her lovely person and becoming attire, for a few brief moments in the dingy, dark parlour, as a striking contrast to everything animate and inanimate which it contained) had gone forth evening after evening, to win all that she felt to be worth winning beneath the starry heavens—Eleanor Stuart, to have brought to her feet the best match in all Bath, or all the county, or all the West of England! It was enough to make her break her heart with vexation. Even the consolation of detraction could scarcely be hers; she had long found out that laughing at Attila, King of the Huns, had gone out of fashion. Those who had begun the season with quizzing Sir Allan Mountjoy had ended it with entertaining and manifesting genuine respect for a man of ancient family, large possessions, and sterling worth. The first recommendation goes a great way in Bath, the second has influence everywhere, and

human nature is not so bad but that the third will in due time be estimated at its true value.

And this man, who had just been returned as member for Brainbridge, who had improved in manner every day, and who above all had been spoken of in high terms by Mr Dillon himself, this man was to be Eleanor's husband! *She* to be Lady Mountjoy, to be presented at Court, to figure in feathers and diamonds, as Flora thought she herself would have done, if she could have got over Sir Allan's way of entering a room, and if—he had proposed to her. Envy can colour as highly as even love itself. In glowing hues rose before her all Eleanor's future career, and it was one blaze of glory, pride, and splendour. She saw the high woods and lovely glades of Mountjoy, with its picturesque old castle, standing grey and solemn under the shadow of ancestral trees—not as a vision of beauty returning to refresh the mind, but as a baleful remembrance of the importance and power

that the mistress of all this beautiful domain would receive.

Flora's fair face was laid upon her hand, as her elbow rested upon the dressing-table, which had ministered to so many triumphant toilettes, and hot scalding tears flowed down her cheeks, coming from the bitterest of all bitter sources, envy at the prosperity of another.

## CHAPTER XXII.

"Whate'er you think, good words
I think were best."—*King John.*

A TAP at the door, the tap of one not to be denied; it was opened, and Mrs George Lonsdale entered.

"My dear, you had better stay at home and rest all the afternoon; I am going to the Crescent, I shall soon ascertain how matters really stand, and act accordingly. I shall take your very best love to your cousin, and say what difficulty I had in keeping you at home, spite of your violent headache, brought on by Mrs Brignell's badly ventilated rooms, so

anxious were you to congratulate her. Depend upon it, when I have felt my way, I shall say all that is proper. You had better keep quiet and admit no callers, have a nap if you can get one, and if not, lie down on the sofa in the shade, and if you want anything to amuse you read the History of a Flirt, you will find it on my dressing-table; I want you to look your best this evening, so you must gratify me. Lord Dinorben is fresh from Oxford, and quite a bookworm, and I expect he will be charmed with you as men often are with those who are unlike themselves. You know he is heir to his uncle's Marquisate, and the girl who marries him may look down upon all the Baronets' wives in the kingdom."

The whole of this speech had soothed the fretted, miserable feelings of Flora. First there were no angry observations about tears spoiling her eyes, which was a relief for which she was quite grateful; then, in her present jealous mood, she was to be spared meeting

Eleanor, who she fancied understood people without a word, and could see into their hearts like a Jesuit; she would certainly have read her mortification if the report of Sir Hugh Barton proved true, or her relief if it were false. Then the vision of young Lord Dinorben's devotion suggested the only consolation to which, we blush to say, her heart was that day accessible.

"I will do just as you advise," she meekly replied; so Mrs George kissed her, and called her a good child, and went to put on her most fascinating bonnet, preparatory to taking the most shady sides of Catharine Place and Brock Street on her way to the Crescent, where, if Eleanor proved to be really engaged, she intended to show a skilfully tempered warmth of interest, which should insure her some share of the civilities at least, if not of the friendship of the future Lady Mountjoy.

"Only the miserable are suspicious," she

said to herself, "the happy can easily believe in the good-will of others."

* * * * *

Poor Flora found her afternoon irksome enough, but there was no help for it; she had been told to keep quiet, and so she did.

Mrs George returned so late that there was no time for her to relate the issue of her call until they were seated together at dinner, and the maid had withdrawn.

"My dear, the news *is* true, Eleanor and Sir Allan Mountjoy are really engaged." Mrs George gave her intelligence in this way without any preface, because she now chose to consider that Flora ought to be glad to hear it, though she very well knew the contrary.

People of the world are often both arbitrary and inconsistent, as those who stoop to be led by them sometimes find to their cost.

Flora felt a choking sensation, and she could only by a great effort go on with her dinner, though she had already met the first shock of

the news. Alas! alas, it was a shock to Flora to hear of her cousin's happiness!

"I never met Mrs Grant in a more amiable mood," continued Mrs George, "not at all reserved, quite pleasant, and properly communicative. Really if it were not for her ill health, which sometimes makes her a little fretful, she would be quite a superior woman."

Mrs Grant a superior woman in the eyes of Mrs George! what, Flora thought, was she to hear next? A vast deal, Flora, that will startle you not a little, if you do not prepare yourself to see your worldly friends sail with the tide, when it is bearing even those they have once ridiculed "on to fortune."

Mrs Grant, the kind, motherly aunt of the future Lady Mountjoy, was a very different person from Mrs Grant who lived obscurely, with a girl who was never talked about, in those inferior lodgings down stairs, upon the smallest possible income, or upon no income at all.

Flora tried to speak, but could not, so Mrs

George went on, having all the talk to herself.

"I did not see Eleanor, but we are to see her to-morrow if we can contrive to call. This was quite as well, because I got all I wanted to hear from Mrs Grant, with whom I sat a long time. Eleanor was very much engaged with Sir Allan, who was about to start off by the train. Mrs Grant says he is always going by the train just now, as he has so much business to attend to, public and private, and he is in a tremendous haste to settle everything, so that the marriage may not be delayed longer than Lady Crampton's state of health makes it necessary. He was going, she said, to order all kinds of improvements at Mountjoy, as he thought nothing too good for his bride; and he was to have a meeting with Mr Bromley, with whom he is a great favourite, and who, of course, highly approves of the match."

"Of course," said Flora, with a sneer.

"Yes, my dear, *of course*, and so must every

body; it is a great thing for the whole family. But if you are questioned about it, as no doubt you will be to-night at the Institution, for even literary people take interest in matches, you must not let it be seen that you view it in that light; you must be very glad that your dear cousin is likely to be so happy with a man of such high principles and charming temper, and all that, as Sir Allan Mountjoy."

"But I do n't think he has a good temper," murmured Flora, sulkily; "I have seen him look as fierce as anything."

"Never mind that, Flora, you had better not say a word against him; nothing makes a girl appear so unamiable as finding fault with the admirers of any of her relations. You know you were always very fond of Eleanor at Carstone, at least there was no reason why you should be otherwise; and now you must be in high spirits, and very much rejoiced, that her romance, as you may as well call it, has ended so happily. As Mrs Grant said it was quite a

romance for her to have been so kind to him when he was a boy, and then for them to meet and come together in after life."

"He has not seen much choice of ladies," said Flora. "I suppose, having known Eleanor so long, he was less afraid of coming forward to her than he would have been to any one else, and he must have been quite sure beforehand that she would have him."

"As to being afraid, Flora, I don't think you would have thought so if you had seen the manly way in which he received my congratulations, when I expressed the pleasure I felt at welcoming into our family a man I so highly esteem."

"You saw him then."

"Yes, when he came in to take leave of Mrs Grant. I never saw a man look to more advantage; he had on one of those becoming new travelling coats, which he really wore with as good an air as Mr Dillon himself."

Attila, King of the Huns, wear a coat with

the inimitable air of Mr Dillon! Flora was altogether bewildered by the way in which her aunt was talking; all principles of action and modes of thinking seemed to her mind to have been overturned and mingled together in an inextricable confusion.

"He must be suddenly altered," was all she could say.

"Yes, that man will surprise everybody, as Mr Dillon justly said after he was gone (and I thought poor dear Mrs Grant looked after him as if he had been her own son). I told her our own plans as I thought but right and friendly; I mentioned that you are going next week to join your mamma at Cheltenham, where I may spend a little time myself, after my trip to London and Paris. She quite thought that you had wisely determined not to go back to Carstone, and in Cheltenham, my love, I have little doubt that you will be admired as much (more you could not be) as you have been in Bath."

But the last part of this speech failed in its intended impression upon the vain spirit of Flora; at the mention of Carstone, her heart, disturbed as it had been by the unhallowed feelings of that day, sank within her. The sensation will be brief, it will quickly pass away, but it will return again whenever the sweetly-scented rose-leaf of worldly hope turns bitter to the taste, and that will often be, and as often, Henry Mordaunt, even in the years to come, when you have long forgiven, will you be avenged.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

"Woman indeed, a gift he would bestow
When he design'd a Paradise below,
The richest earthly boon his hands afford,
Deserves to be beloved, but not adored."

COWPER.

MORE bland than ever looked the courteous Rector of Carstone, as he sat after dinner in his favourite chair, deliberately enjoying his dessert and wine.

Opposite to him was a very congenial companion, one who satisfied him more and more at every interview, though in many things he was very different from himself.

"My dear Sir Allan," he said, in a tone of real kindness, which was something far beyond

the smooth coating of politeness which to a guest he never laid aside. "My dear Sir Allan, I will not allow you any longer to depreciate yourself. If any man deserves my niece, and I estimate her highly, as you know, undoubtedly you are the man, and I have no hesitation in telling you that I shall esteem your relationship, your friendship, and your neighbourhood, as very considerable additions to my own comfort and happiness."

"My dear Mr Bromley, you are only too good."

"Not at all, my dear sir, not at all. But you are not doing the least justice to my wine, and I assure you that good judges have not considered it bad."

Allan Mountjoy filled his glass mechanically.

"I trust," he said earnestly, "that I may be able to enlist you on my side, so that there may be no delay; when my happiness, as far as man can speak of happiness, is assured, all things will

go on better and more easily; my best adviser will be ever with me, every labour will be sweetened, every plan more hopefully carried out."

"Well, in that matter you must try to induce the ladies to think as you do. For myself, I have nothing to oppose to what you wish, as I confess there is no reasonable cause for delay. I thank you for the open and unreserved manner in which you have confided to me the state of your affairs, and the arrangements you intend to make in favour of my niece. Nothing could possibly be more satisfactory than either, or more gratifying than the kind and generous spirit with which you refer to me as to all that relates to Eleanor's future welfare."

"I thank you sincerely for your kind opinion. Since you approve, I have now nothing to do but to set the lawyers to work as fast as possible, and, for my part, I have never found them dilatory, as they are too often accused of being; when they see a client thoroughly in

earnest in his wish for haste, then they give him the benefit of their fine energies to the full."

The courteous Rector smiled. "You seem at present to have a high opinion of all men; may it long continue."

"I have reason," replied Allan Mountjoy, with enthusiasm, "to have a kind feeling towards all. In adversity I have met with that goodness which the heart forgets not until it has ceased to beat.

"And in prosperity, if I may venture to finish your speech for you, you have, of course, met with all kinds of virtues, from all kinds of men, ready for your service."

"And if at my service," returned Allan, with a smile, "a good master may make use of even the mere attendants upon his prosperity so as to turn them to a happy account both as regards themselves and him."

"Ah, ha, my good sir, though you speak so very diffidently of your merits in the eyes

of the ladies, I see that you are in some degree aware of your own calibre."

"I trust that I have not spoken presumptuously. A man should indeed speak with doubt and awe in alluding to that tremendously responsible thing, his influence over others, when he has so many hard battles for the right to maintain with himself."

Allan Mountjoy just raised his glass to his lips, and put it down again, and then seemed about to fall into one of his fits of sudden musing.

"What a strange creature it is," thought Mr Bromley, "and noble as strange, like a highly mettled horse, alive to the slightest touch. It is fortunate that Nelly, with her delicate tact, will understand so well how to treat him. Well, and surely I may flatter myself that I have as much tact as any man, and yet I seem to have annoyed him by what most people would have construed into a compliment. He is a

curious study; I will leave him to break the silence, as what he first says may give a clue to his thoughts."

The polite Mr Bromley passed a dish of early strawberries towards him, but he did not appear to heed the movement.

"Well I don't admire abstraction, which is only admissible when a man is alone," thought the baffled host. "Nelly must try to cure him of that, and I dare say she will."

"How utterly unworthy does great happiness make a man feel," exclaimed Allan Mountjoy, and his large dark eyes met Mr Bromley's with an expression of such deep humility as he had never yet seen look out through the windows of any human heart.

Mr Bromley did not immediately reply, but looked down and seemed to find something that required arranging in his faultless and snowy wristband.

"Yes," he said at length, in his quiet reasoning manner, "with some natures it

may, but certainly not with all. Many, I apprehend, if they acknowledge the truth, would have to own that they think they deserve good fortune, and that when they have attained it they only feel that they are in their proper place."

"Some, humanly speaking, may be said to merit more than others; but how unsuited is the condition of mind you mention to fallen and dependent man."

"Undoubtedly; but if all men saw their situation and deserts in the true light, this world would be a very different one from what it is. Let me again remind you that you are doing my wine no justice."

"Thank you, no more; I hope you have had good accounts from Cheltenham?"

"I am obliged to you, I hear that my sister and Flora are quite well and enjoying themselves. They have two or three good introductions which have led to more, and they do not want for gaiety, which I believe some ladies

consider to be an indispensable ingredient in happiness. It is needless for me to tell *you* that I much regret the issue of Flora's engagement, which promised to give her all that her real friends could desire."

"Ah, yes, what a grief of heart it has been to—to—Eleanor. She did all that one human being could do to save another. Heaven bless her!"

"To save!—you speak strongly, my dear sir."

"And I fear truly."

The smooth brow of the worthy Rector slightly contracted, and the serene expression of his countenance became clouded, but only for a short time. His next words diverged altogether from the subject.

"I rejoice to hear that the air of Clevedon has done so much for Lady Crampton. The letter I had from Eleanor this morning states that she improves daily. I have written to beg that, when their kind hostess can spare

them, Mrs Grant and my niece would come to me. Carstone was always a favourite place with Eleanor, and I begin to feel that a little congenial ladies' society would be very agreeable. You have seen a great deal of Mrs Grant in Bath,—is she so much out of health as to make her wish to keep at home?"

"By no means, I should think. I saw a great deal of her, certainly, and I shall always be grateful for her kindness and for the friendship with which she has honoured me. Mrs Grant is a lady for whom I feel the truest affection and esteem."

Mr Bromley was pleased by the warmth with which his young guest spoke. He made up his mind to try what this relative was like, with whom he had had no personal intercourse for a very long time, in consequence of some of those events which arise in families, bringing estrangement of feeling, which may, or not, be cured as time goes on. He had been much gratified with her letter about Eleanor's

engagement, and he had resolved to ask her to Carstone. At the worst, he believed that she must be better than Mrs Lonsdale had been.

"I suppose you will be a great deal at Mountjoy until Parliament meets?" inquired Mr Bromley.

"Yes, and when it does, I trust that I shall not go up to Town alone. Ah, what a lot will be mine, with such a peerless creature by my side, as fitted to shine in society as to bless me in retirement. How often, when I have quitted her, have those lines occurred to me. You know them:

"'Polish'd as though in Courts she 'd ever been,
And good, as though the world she 'd never seen.'"

Mr Bromley smiled and sipped his wine, and smiled again.

"Now, if you will allow me, I have quite a serious piece of advice to offer you, to which, if I may venture to say so, you will do well to take heed in time."

"Believe me, I am all attention."

"Well, then, take care how you do one you love so much wrong as to believe her perfect. If you do, you will expect what cannot be in human nature, what never has been, and never will be. The deficiencies you are not prepared for will bring a disappointment which properly you will have no right to feel; but that will not prevent its coming, and then in your own mind at least, if you do not let it be seen outwardly, you will visit upon another what is a fault in yourself. I firmly believe, and as a dispassionate spectator I have watched human nature a great deal in this phase, that an undue estimation before marriage is the rock upon which many a matrimonial ship has split. Those in love are apt to imagine that an exception to all humanity will be somehow (they never even try to analyze how) made in their favour, and then what a reäction comes. Undoubtedly it is much to be lamented that any two persons should set out in life together, building their hope of happiness upon a false

foundation. Detection must, as a natural consequence, follow upon error. Truth only endures to the end. Let people of sense then give up this chimera of perfection, and that in time to prevent injustice to others, and dissatisfaction to themselves."

"I have need to bear in mind the useful truth you have uttered," returned Allan Mountjoy, "for I question if, at present, there breathes upon the earth a man who more requires the advice you have given than myself."

There was an enthusiastic, glowing light in the young man's eyes, which struck Mr Bromley not unpleasantly, and caused an indulgent smile to play round his mouth.

Perchance at that moment his own mind was carried back to a time in the far past, when imagination might fondly have believed what experience had never the opportunity of testing.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

"Whatever in her sight I'd seem
I'd really be; I'd never blend
With my delight in her a dream
'T would change her cheek to comprehend."

PATMORE.

"WHEN I am with you, my children, I feel as I used to do a long, long time ago, when I was quite a little girl."

Lady Crampton, as she murmured these words, turned her eyes lovingly upon her nephew Allan, and Eleanor Stuart. She was reclining with her head comfortably propped up with cushions, upon a couch, which Allan

had drawn close to the window, that she might share in the pleasure with which he and his betrothed were watching the lovely, changing tints left behind like the bright memory of departed worth, after the glorious setting of the sun. Mrs Grant was sitting at a little distance, quietly happy, enjoying a sort of serene repose befitting the evening hour, and promoted not a little by the refreshing tea of which they were all comfortably partaking, in accordance with the strict medical rule which had prescribed early meals for the invalid.

"Sunset upon the sea is certainly a most beautiful sight," remarked Mrs Grant, "which I have not enjoyed for some time; and this pretty little Clevedon is such a snug, comfortable place that I feel this evening quite sorry that we should ever leave it."

"Quiet and repose can only be really enjoyed for a short season," returned Allan Mountjoy. "The refreshing rest which the

spirit needs might soon be turned into the Castle of Indolence."

"That is a danger which you need not dread," said Eleanor, with the bright smile which he so loved to see; "active and energetic life is your sphere, both from natural impulse and from strong conviction."

"I trust that you read me right."

"I rather think I always have."

"Yes," he answered, looking down upon her with a grave, deep fondness, and speaking in a low tone, which was almost mournful in its tenderness; "yes, you have, even when you had a poor, rough book before you, ungilded and unbound, and therefore, in the eyes of others, valueless."

Eleanor did not reply, she did not even return his gaze; and the eyes that before had sparkled with light were now shrouded by their long dark lashes; and the bright smile had changed to a look chastened and softened,

the evidence of a stronger emotion than any smile could have expressed.

What added yet another charm to Eleanor's daily increasing influence over the heart of Allan Mountjoy, was her perfect understanding of those deeper thoughts which at times stir the spirits of some men so powerfully. When such were expressed by him, they were met with that perfect reciprocity which must be felt to be understood, and which may be shown as much by silence as by the most eloquent words. There are moments, as most men must have experienced, when something better is wanted than the sparkling repartee, and the lively sally which they feel to be charming enough at the proper seasons, but at others more uncongenial than dulness itself.

What was it that called Allan off from the earnest perusal of that fair face, in which all that he had read had charmed him, and what

he did not at once understand had been a study so full of interest?

Lady Crampton had put down her cup and saucer by her side, on the couch, meekly thinking that the noble pair before her (as she called them in her heart) were much too happy and too absorbed in each other to attend to her. She had scarcely made the movement when Allan was by her side, and affectionately waiting upon her. The poor old lady's spirits were weak, and at this little action the tears sprang to her eyes, though a smile lighted up her wasted features.

Eleanor's eyes rested upon them both, with a beaming, bright expression. Assured was she, as every true woman should be, that the man who was prompt to leave even her side to be at the service of sickness, age, or sorrow, would be hers more truly and more stedfastly than the selfish, exclusive worshipper could ever be. She moved closer to the couch, and sat down by it.

"Come, my dear madam," said Allan to Mrs Grant; "if you will take this chair and join us, we shall be as happy a little assembly as any in England."

Mrs Grant came graciously forward from her distant seat at the bidding of her favourite, and the conversation became pleasantly general.

"Only think," said Mrs Grant, "to-morrow we shall be at Carstone; I have not seen the place for years."

"I am so glad you are going where you will be so happy, my dear, and so very sorry," said Lady Crampton to Eleanor, "but you must not think about me; I shall do very well with my old friend, Miss Peebles. I can't think, Allan, my dear, how you managed to find her out, but there you do contrive to do everything you set your mind upon."

"That is quite true, my dear Lady Crampton," said Mrs Grant; "I am sure he will

never let his friends want for anything, great or small, that he can do for them."

"Do not give me so large a character as that," exclaimed Allan, "few men could deserve it, in fact I think not any; we are such poor, uncertain creatures that we cannot answer for the future even coming up to the imperfect standard of the present."

"Ah," returned Mrs Grant, "you speak seriously to rebuke me for praising you to your face. I will try not to do it again, for I see that it annoys you."

"Not annoys me, dear madam; it is not likely that anything you do me the favour to say to me can annoy. A too high estimate from persons of merit is humbling; that is the feeling, and nothing more. To disclaim on such occasions is tiresome, and, what is worse, is open to misconstruction as the pride that apes humility, while to accept in silence seems like a tacit hypocrisy, which the honest mind rejects."

"Really you quite alarm me by the strong views you take; I am sure I should be very sorry to put such a painful alternative before anybody."

Mrs Grant spoke with some slight pique.

"Do not misunderstand him," said Eleanor, softly, "he loves you so well that he is afraid of ever disappointing you, if you erect a standard too high for mortal strength to reach, that is all."

"Nay, nay," exclaimed Allan, vehemently, "you impute to me an arrogance to which I never will plead guilty."

"I see my error," said Eleanor, in words just above her breath, words heard by him alone, while a smile at herself, and in spite of herself, played round her mouth, and a deep, rich blush mantled almost painfully over her whole countenance, while over Allan Mountjoy's flashed a sudden expression of exulting, triumphant gladness. It was, however, but a flash, that perfection of the heart's full rapture;

another feeling succeeded to it, deep, thoughtful, and earnest, even to sadness.

"It may be so," he thought, "it may be that, blinded by her most precious love, more precious to me than ought on this side heaven, she deems me far higher, better, nobler than I am, or ever can be, perchance, even as I more truly think of her, and if so, how shall I meet that large demand of her bright hopes; how guard against that disappointment, which Mr Bromley said, so wisely, must follow upon the undue exaltation of any mortal being?"

Ah, there is but one way, though to some it may seem like the way of life, a strait and a narrow one, in which the children of earth, knowing that they can only be clothed with a perfection not their own, hereafter can safely walk together. And that is the way of simplicity and humbleness of mind, in which they are willing to be taken even as they are, and as nothing better, and are grateful to be loved with all their errors; seeking to cover failure and

sin, not by concealment or hypocrisy, but by repentance and amendment, and meeting truth face to face, even though in the sight of one who could have worshipped them in falsehood, it should lower them to the dust.

## CHAPTER XXV.

" Needs not to paint that joyful hour,
The nuptial vow, the bridal glee."—Hogg.

" So, obedient to the request of the bridegroom, you persist in declining to join us ? "

These words came from Mr Dillon, and they were addressed to Miss Cathcart, who had just seated herself with her writing materials before her, in the drawing-room of Carstone Rectory.

" Thank you, I cannot well go, as the expedition would occupy the whole morning. You will be back, I expect, only in time for dinner, and the post here goes out at five."

"And you prefer writing to an old lady, who will scarcely understand what you say, to enjoying the hospitality of Cranberry Hall?"

"I was so pleased with the affectionate feeling that prompted Sir Allan's wish, that I would rather gratify it to-day than do anything else that can be imagined."

"I say no more," returned Mr Dillon, deliberately drawing on his exquisitely fitting gloves.

"I am sure it is very kind of her," lisped Miss Frampton, patronizingly. She had been another of Eleanor Stuart's bridesmaids, and was quite a little beauty.

"Is it the fashion for the ladies at a wedding to admire the bridegroom to the exclusion of all others?" inquired Mr Dillon.

"No, not always," she replied, smiling and casting down her eyes.

"They are all alike," said Mr Dillon to himself, with an inward sneer. And yet he made an exception to that sweeping thought, as he

looked for a moment at Miss Cathcart, who had answered him with as much of coldness as politeness would permit, and who had disregarded even the wish that he had condescended to express that she would change her mind, and join the gay party about to set out to lunch at Sir Thomas Headington's. An expression of something like disappointment was upon his countenance when he left the room, which Miss Cathcart told herself that she did not, and assured herself that she would not see. The days of a fatal delusion had gone by; they must not return. She was now peacefully, calmly, tranquilly at rest, and her vessel once well-nigh wrecked by the storm which had followed the deceitful brightness of a vain, false worship, should be tempted to leave its safe haven no more!

Her thoughts for a while turned fondly to the bride of yesterday, and she looked forward gratefully to the addition to her happiness which she expected from her friendship, and

from that of her noble husband, for so to herself she styled him, being one of those who had learned fully to appreciate his character and his powers.

"She will be happy, if any wife can be," she mused. "No doubt there are some bright exceptions to the sad cases of which I have heard, and to those which have come so painfully before my own notice."

"What, musing, fair lady, instead of setting about the work for which you have deprived others of the pleasure of your company?" exclaimed Mr Bromley, who had just entered the room, with a look of satisfaction, and a manner which expressed his readiness to be pleased with everybody. The first wedding that had ever taken place under his auspices had passed off in a most successful and brilliant manner; he had, with feelings of almost paternal pride and pleasure, given away his favourite niece to the man whom, of all others, he would have chosen for her; his old friend,

the Bishop of the diocese, had performed the ceremony in a manner so impressive as almost to move the bridesmaids to tears. The breakfast had been faultless in arrangement, and the company showed as much tact and feeling as even he could desire; everybody was pleased with the bridegroom, and everybody admired the bride; the dinner party, which concluded the day's festivities, had been supported with unflagging spirit, and Mrs Grant, gentle and unassuming, and probably upheld by the happiness and gratitude with which her heart was full, had done the honours of the table much more to his satisfaction than the fidgety and uneasy Mrs Lonsdale.

"I shall soon commence my pleasing task," was Miss Cathcart's gentle reply. "You know I have now the whole afternoon before me," she added, politely, seeing that her courteous host seemed inclined for conversation, as persons in good spirits generally are.

"Allow me," said he, "to remove your writ-

ing-case to this little table nicely shaded between the curtains. Here Eleanor always wrote her letters, and it is called her table; here you are completely shrouded from the sun, and you can keep the blind up so as to enjoy the view, which, at this point, we are in the habit of thinking very good. When the eyes rest upon a pleasing object, the ideas are refreshed and invigorated."

"Thank you, this is a charming seat; I shall write my letter twice as well here. I am not surprised that Lady Mountjoy preferred this place to any other in the room."

Mr Bromley smiled benignantly. His niece's new name sounded pleasantly upon his ear, and he admired Miss Cathcart for the easy, natural way in which she had uttered it, without any awkward hesitation, or young ladylike exclamation about its sounding so odd.

"May I request you, Miss Cathcart, to be so kind as to present my best compliments to Lady Crampton, and to assure her that our only draw-

back on the happy occasion was her absence, the cause of which we very sincerely lament."

"I shall be very happy to deliver your kind message."

"I flatter myself that you will not be compelled in your character of a faithful historian to introduce many *contretemps*, in the account of yesterday's proceedings?"

"Not one, truly not one; I have attended many weddings, but never one so bright, so hopeful, so successful in all its arrangements as this has been; if I can only truly record it simply as it was, Lady Crampton will be deeply gratified."

"You do us honour, Miss Cathcart; such an opinion from a young lady of your discernment is of great value."

"What a noble creature is Sir Allan Mountjoy," rejoined Miss Cathcart, taking no notice but by a polite smile of the compliment to herself, "so lofty in his sentiments, and yet so simple. They are, indeed, a well-matched

couple; I hope to know them better, and expect to be the better from the knowledge."

"They are well suited, I believe," returned the well-pleased Mr Bromley. "But I trespass upon your valuable time; I will retire, and leave you to your pleasing labour."

"I have ample time, I assure you, and you can kindly help me as to some particulars. Who was that care-worn village woman who brought some flowers for the table, and whose coming touched the bride so much?"

"One of my parishioners, Sarah Jennings; Eleanor took a kind interest in her daughter, who died of what is called a broken heart; she was the village beauty, and rather like the young girl in Horseley's affecting picture in the Vernon Gallery."

"Thank you; and who was that sad, interesting young woman, who brought those pretty white flowers that Lady Mountjoy took away with her so carefully?"

"Ah, why, she must be Mary Daniells, who

was married here last year. Eleanor, I remember, gathered the flowers for her wedding, and it has already proved an unhappy one."

"Poor thing! Lady Mountjoy must have left a pleasing memory behind her amongst the poor of Carstone."

"Yes, she was fond of visiting, and really sympathizing with them, when she stayed with me; often working real good, and sometimes aiming at impossibilities, with the amiable credulity which is to be noticed in some of your sex, before experience has taught them of what hard, intractable materials men are made."

"An error on the right side."

"But still an error. The disappointed, and they are a class too numerous, are those who in any of the views of life have commenced by expecting too much. Thus, when benevolence has been the aim and it has failed, as, in this imperfect world, it often does, then we see the philanthropist turned into the misanthrope; and

the romantic Lady Bountiful changed into a morose being inclined to close her doors upon all humanity. You smile; of course I am speaking generally. Eleanor has too much natural good-sense ever to run into extremes, and hers is a character which time will only temper and mature. But we are diverging from our subject; have you any more questions to ask? I see that you are inclined to introduce a romantic episode or two into your narrative."

"No thank you, I think I have all my materials now. I suppose that was an old friend of Lady Mountjoy, that original, kind-hearted Mr Hollowdean, who looked quite affected when Sir Allan returned thanks?"

"Yes, quite an old friend."

"How amusing it was to listen to the conversation between him and that good-natured, spirited Miss Headington, to whom I took quite a fancy because she seemed so fond of the bride."

"All bridesmaids are, I believe, or think it their duty to pretend to be. That opinion is not original; I borrow it from Mr Dillon, a very superior and agreeable man, whose esteem for Mountjoy does credit to them both. I presume you knew Mr Dillon well in Bath?"

"I used to know him very well."

"He is a man who is quite aware of the difference between a good glass of wine and a bad one. He pronounced my old Madeira the best he had ever tasted."

Mr Bromley, who never remained long enough to tire anybody, now quietly withdrew. Miss Cathcart looked down and arranged her blotting case, and for some little time she remained thinking so deeply as scarcely to notice the entrance of Mrs Grant, who came in extremely tired and very happy to rest in one corner of a luxurious sofa, putting on her spectacles and taking up a book, to appear to read, but in reality to indulge in satisfied and hopeful thoughts.

After a while Miss Cathcart's pen was taken up, and a full description of the happy scene of yesterday was carefully written, for the poor sick lady who would treasure every line. Affectionately from the heart of the amiable, unselfish writer came every word, and there were many, which spoke of Eleanor; and with esteem true and earnest was mention made of Allan Mountjoy, whose almost filial love had shed such consolation over the declining days of one who, under his influence, had awakened to a better life, who, in her eleventh hour, had, in humble penitence, satisfied a life-long thirst with living water, and turned away from the broken cisterns of the world for ever.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

"But to the generous, still improving mind,
That gives the hopeless heart to sing for joy,
Diffusing kind beneficence around,
Boastless, as now descends the silent dew;
To him the long review of order'd life
Is inward rapture, only to be felt."—THOMSON.

"What follow'd?—I was left alone,
And the world seized me as its own.
I sought gay Fashion's motley throng,
On Pleasure's tide I sail'd along;
Till, by rude storms and tempests toss'd,
My shatter'd bark at length was lost."

SYNTAX.

No lot upon earth is perfect—no age, no position, nor happy combination of circum-

stances, can furnish here that unalloyed felicity of which the romancer dreams, or with which the pen of the enthusiast closes, in glowing language, the description of some troubled career, making those who have not yet learned to drink habitually, to their soul's strength, of the wholesome though often bitter cup of truth, look forward to some vague, bright future upon this side the grave, in which all that now distresses them shall be removed, and all which now seems dark and mysterious shall be clearly understood. No such future will they find, no state in which there will not be trial of some kind, either known or unknown to the world around them; let it be their care to make such trial, in whatsoever form it comes, work more truly for their peace than the most untroubled quietude of prosperity could ever have done.

With earnest spirits, and most grateful loving hearts, did Allan and Eleanor Mountjoy receive the many blessings of their lot,

meeting together every darkening cloud with humility, and therefore with strength, for they knew that for erring mortals perpetual sunshine is neither desirable nor deserved.

With constantly increasing esteem, that great cement of love, they continued to regard each other, and therefore they were in each other happy, as happy as it is possible for any in this world to be; and their happiness was a diffusive principle, spreading not only to those within their personal influence, but extending far beyond it, to embrace all whom they could save or serve. There was no dulness, no flagging in their daily life, because they worked together, planned together, and enjoyed together, as far as they could; and in those matters in which they appeared to be separated they were yet united in sympathy and feeling. Proud was Eleanor of her husband, more proud than she could ever tell him, or he would ever believe. From his enlarged charity and touching humility she

learned many a lesson, which gradually and certainly tended to complete in her the softening work which had been begun alone. Now the spirit, whose snare had been pride, rose only against injustice or oppression; a change had come over her which those who knew her best could not understand; its effect was that almost all who came in contact with her became her friends; even her constant admirer, Mr Bromley, felt that Lady Mountjoy had acquired yet a new charm which his much-prized Eleanor Stuart had not possessed. He saw with satisfaction that not a house in the county was so famed for graceful hospitalities as Mountjoy Castle, and that the plans of usefulness, which at first he was inclined to fear would be carried too far, did not interfere with the due discharge of every social duty and pleasing courtesy. It is quite true that those who are the most occupied can do the most. In the midst of his elegant leisure, Mr

Bromley acknowledged this truth, and felt its application in a very gratifying way, when he sat, the most welcome of all her guests, at Eleanor's well-ordered table, graced by lofty sentiments, delicate wit, and friendliness at once earnest and refined. The crown of all his possessions, his ninth statue, more inestimably precious than all that the world could offer, was Eleanor to the faithful heart of Allan Mountjoy, and when she felt how truly she could trust, how unaffectedly she could respect, where she so deeply loved, how profound was her thankfulness for that short and seeming evil out of which had been worked such great and lasting good.

Mr Hollowdean of Hollowdean never married; Lady Mountjoy alone was his type of all feminine intellect and goodness.

He valued her more and more with an honest, hearty friendship, and between himself and Sir Allan there existed a very firm bond

of esteem and good-will, not a little strengthened in the mind of the honest Squire by the fact that in the veins of Mountjoy of Mountjoy flowed some of the oldest blood in the kingdom.

Miss Headington, who has not yet met with any proposal, and she has had several, that could induce her to give up her own independence and her fond father's society, declares Mountjoy Castle to be the most agreeable house in the neighbourhood, and that she contrives to pay her visits and make her tours when its owners are absent, which is often necessarily the case, as Sir Allan discharges his public duties as faithfully as his private ones, and when he is in Town his wife is always with him. Lady Crampton sleeps the long sleep of death, in the beautiful old chancel of Mountjoy Church. She died at the Castle, about six months after her nephew's marriage; sweetly soothed by his and Eleanor's tender affection, peaceful, and at rest.

Herr Schlegel, with recovered health and vigour, is pursuing in Germany that arduous labour which is his pleasure, more patient than before, and therefore more successful. Allan Mountjoy watches his progress with satisfaction and gratitude, ever ready with his sympathy, and cheering him on the path to fame with the devotion of a son.

Since Eleanor's marriage, life has become to Mrs Grant brighter and more active than it had been for many long years. She is always a welcome guest at Mountjoy, when she can be persuaded to share the happiness of those she loves; but for the greater part of the year she chooses to be in Bath, and the wisdom of this arrangement is highly approved by Mr Bromley, who holds very steadily to the opinion that, as the most angelic of mortal creatures have their failings and peculiarities, they judge for the best when they give themselves the safety-valve of an independent home of their own.

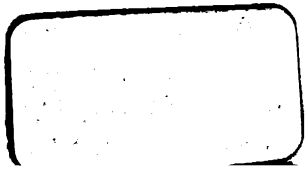
After a while, one of Henry Mordaunt's influential friends obtained for him a better preferment than even the good living of Steyne, and with mingled feelings of relief and regret he quitted a scene where so much of happiness had dawned upon him, only to be succeeded by that bitterness of trust betrayed, from the effect of which it is difficult for even the strongest of minds to rally.

And she who might, in blessing him, have blessed herself, she who had turned away from the path so plainly and easily marked out before her, of honour, love, and duty, how fared it with her, the worshipped Flora of one vain season in Bath? To Bath succeeded Cheltenham, to Cheltenham succeeded Bath; the scene changing, the spirit still the same, only becoming day by day, and hour by hour, more deeply dyed in folly, more hopelessly enchained by worldliness, sometimes exulting in triumph, and then overpowered by bitter envy at the

success of others. At a ball at Cheltenham, the news reached her that Mr Dillon and Miss Cathcart, so near, and yet so much apart in the gay world of Bath, had learned to understand each other amidst nature's loveliness and majesty at Mountjoy; and after this had been told her by one of her partners, she danced more indefatigably and flirted more recklessly than ever.

And so it went on, the spirit ever deteriorating, without recovery or return; the thirst for admiration only increasing in proportion as beauty's attractions waned; one stream of admirers following another, as spectators pass on before some public sight, and having once seen it, care to return no more. Ah, sad, sad spectacle, sad in the eyes of feeling humanity and of sorrowing angels, is that of woman stooping from her high position, regardless of her lofty mission, and reduced at last to beg, with a spirit meaner than that of the mendicant,

and with art and simulation far less excusable than his, for poor and scanty doles of that admiration which she could once command.

THE END.

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